



University
of Exeter

REF2029
Research Excellence Framework

The University of Exeter REF2029 Code of Practice

Date of submission: 14 May 2026

Structure of the REF2029 Code of Practice

Part 1: Introduction	Para. No
a) How the CoP supports the REF2029 principles	1
b) Contextualisation within Institutional Policies	10
i. <i>Responsible Research Assessment</i>	27
ii. <i>Part-time and fixed-term contract staff</i>	33
c) Update on Actions Since REF 2021	38
Part 2: Identifying Staff Contracts with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR)	
a) Policies and Procedures:	64
i. <i>Criteria for SRR</i>	64
ii. <i>Decision-Making and Communication</i>	69
b) Staff, Committees, and Training	70
c) Appeals	71
d) Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	72
Part 3: Determining Research Independence	
a) Policies and Procedures:	73
i. <i>Criteria and Evidence.</i>	73
ii. <i>Decision-Making and Communication</i>	82
b) Staff, Committees, and Training	92
i. <i>Roles and Responsibilities</i>	92
ii. <i>Training</i>	98
c) Appeals	99
d) Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	103
Part 4: Allocating Contracts to UoAs	
a) Policies and Procedures	107
i. <i>Criteria and Evidence</i>	109
ii. <i>Decision-Making and Communication.</i>	113
b) Staff, Committees, and Training:	122
i. <i>Roles and Responsibilities</i>	122
ii. <i>Training</i>	129
c) Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	130
Part 5: Selecting outputs	
<i>Background: REF Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU) Guidance and the University of Exeter context</i>	133
a) Policies and Procedures:	143
i. <i>Identifying substantive link to outputs</i>	143
ii. <i>Selecting outputs where the substantive link is via former staff</i>	158
iii. <i>Assigning outputs to UoAs</i>	171
iv. <i>Procedures for supporting diversity of outputs</i>	203
v. <i>Procedures for ensuring submissions are representative of the research undertaken within the submitting unit during the REF period</i>	216
vi. <i>Policies and procedures and responsible research assessment practice</i>	227
b) Staff, Committees, and Training:	231

i. <i>Roles and Responsibilities</i>	231
ii. <i>Training</i>	236
c) Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	237
Part 6: Appendices	
a) Equality Impact Assessment	Appendix 1
b) Referenced material in the CoP	Appendices 2-8

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1.a) How the CoP supports the REF2029 principles of robustness, transparency and equity and inclusion

1. Our Code of Practice (CoP) is being developed and implemented in the spirit of our **institutional values** of Discovery, Respect, Excellence, Inclusion, Community. We will do this by abiding by the following principles:
 - We are committed to research **excellence**, to using innovative and creative approaches to research **discovery** and nurturing the **research ambitions** of our staff and students;
 - All staff and students will be treated with **courtesy** and **respect**;
 - Our research **community** is broad and encompasses both research and research-enabling staff and students ;
 - We will ensure that the **diversity** of our research community and our areas of research are reflected in our REF2029 preparations and in our submission;
 - We will be **inclusive** in our approach to determining eligibility for submission to REF2029;
 - Decision-making processes must be **robust** and **transparent**;
 - All staff will be made aware of where **accountability** for REF2029 lies through the sharing of information about the governance structures for REF2029, and about the roles involved in supporting our preparations;
 - Our research ambitions are collectively articulated and delivered, therefore, our preparations for this assessment exercise must also be **collaborative**;
 - Whilst REF is an assessment exercise, we will remember that REF2029 is also an opportunity to **celebrate** our collective successes and strengths;
 - We **recognise** that our REF2029 submission is the result of contributions from all staff across the University of Exeter and our postgraduate research students.
2. The REF is an important tool for assessing the strength and quality of the University's research, impact, culture and other research-related activities. A strong performance brings many benefits that are felt across the institution as whole and encompasses all of our research, teaching and other endeavours. As such, the University aims to strengthen its performance in REF2029, to continue to reap the benefits that research excellence brings. Our CoP has been developed to support the University in achieving the best outcome for the University that showcases our research strengths, whilst embedding the important principles of Robustness, Transparency, Equity and Inclusion.

Robustness

3. The policies and procedures underpinning the selection of outputs will not vary between UoAs (whilst recognising that, exceptionally, there might be some variance in approach for discipline-based reasons) and are governed by the institutional values and principles laid out above. These same principles will shape and govern all policies and procedures for identifying staff contracts

with “significant responsibility for research” (SRR) and “independent researcher” status, as well as outputs selection.

4. The University of Exeter has developed a robust framework for recruitment, promotion and career development in its “Exeter Academic” Framework and is able to reliably identify all contracts that automatically meet the criteria of SRR and research independence. Where decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, this University has defined a clear set of criteria for identifying research independence that will use data from our grant-capture system, and a robust process for review and ratification (see Section 3.a).
5. The University has a clear governance structure (Appendix 3) and has identified relevant roles and responsibilities throughout this document. As noted in Appendix 7, all decision makers will undertake specific Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity training, which will include considerations of responsible research assessment.

Transparency

6. The CoP has been developed iteratively to align with the release of REF2029 policy modules. An Equality Impact assessment (EIA) has been conducted at each iteration, focusing on different elements of the CoP: Output selection, Research Independence, and Impact Case Study selection.
7. At each iteration, a draft CoP was developed in collaboration with the Research & Impact Executive Committee (RIEC). Once approved by RIEC and the University Executive Board (UEB), drafts were shared with all staff at the university for feedback and consultation, and further iterations of the CoP were produced incorporating feedback. This approach has ensured that our CoP is representative of the research community at the institution.
8. Approved drafts have been made accessible on internal SharePoint communication sites and once finalised, the CoP will be published on the external website. A detailed programme of communication about REF, the CoP and the procedures noted here are listed in Appendix 8.

Equity and inclusion

9. The CoP aligns with the University of Exeter’s strong ethos of Equity and Inclusivity (as noted in Section 1.b, below, in relation to institutional policies) and is embodied in the approach laid out in this CoP for identifying staff contracts with SRR, those who are independent researchers and policies relating to the selection of outputs and impact case studies. EIAs have been conducted and have been instrumental in shaping development of all relevant policies within the CoP.

1.b) Contextualisation with Institutional Policies

10. The CoP reflects the University of Exeter’s values and policies on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, People, Culture and Environment, and Responsible Research Assessment, ensuring that the processes underpinning REF2029 are fair, robust, transparent, and inclusive.

Institutional Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

11. The University of Exeter values the diversity of its community because it believes this enriches employment, research, studying and learning experiences.
12. The University is committed to a policy of equality of opportunity and aims to provide a working, learning and social environment that is free from unfair discrimination. It aims to ensure that staff, students, visitors and all others associated with the University are treated with dignity, respect, and equity, regardless of inappropriate distinctions, such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation (as identified under the Equality Act 2010 as 'protected characteristics').
13. In addition, the University will comply with all relevant legislation and aims to promote good practice in all aspects of the University.
14. In line with its Value of 'Community', the University recognises that all its staff, students, visitors and others associated with the University have a responsibility to ensure that their actions comply with both the requirements and the spirit of the policy.
15. The University Council has the responsibility for developing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy, monitoring its implementation and reviewing its effectiveness, supported by the Wellbeing, Inclusion and Culture Committee (see para. 24-26 below).
16. The University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy can be found here: [Policies | Equality, Diversity and Inclusion | University of Exeter](#)
17. Other relevant policies and procedures include:
 - [Adoption Leave](#)
 - [Bullying and harassment](#)
 - [Dignity & Respect Policy](#)
 - [Domestic Abuse support](#)
 - [Climate Emergency Policy](#)
 - [Emergency Leave](#)
 - [Fertility Treatment Leave](#)
 - [Gender Identity and Transitioning Policy](#)
 - [Hate Crime and Hate Incidents](#)
 - [LGBTQ+ Inclusion Guidance](#)
 - [Maternity Leave](#)
 - [Support and Report Students](#)
 - [Social Media Policy](#)
 - [Mediation for Staff](#)
 - [Modern Slavery Act Statement](#)
 - [Parental Bereavement Leave Policy](#)
 - [Parental Leave](#)
 - [Parents & Carers](#)
 - [Paternity/Partner Leave](#)
 - [Shared Parental Leave](#)
 - [Code of Professional Conduct: relations between staff members](#)
 - [Code of Professional Conduct: Policy on Staff/Student Personal Relationships](#)
 - [LGBTQ+ Staff support & guidance](#)
 - [Support and Report Staff](#)
 - [Freedom of Speech Policy](#)
 - [Social Media Guidance](#)

Challenges in Building an Inclusive Research Community

18. The University of Exeter has been on a journey of reflection on its culture and how to address ongoing challenges such as:
 - The underrepresentation of certain groups in senior research roles and leadership.
 - The gender pay gap
 - Embedding inclusive leadership and accountability at all levels of the research ecosystem.

19. This has been informed by key initiatives, including the Provost Commission, University Speak Out Guardians, Widening Participation plans and feedback from our staff and student community.
20. The University is committed to supporting a diverse research-facing community. Its commitment to supporting historically underrepresented groups in HEIs is underpinned by evidence-based action plans benchmarked by external accreditations (e.g. Athena Swan, The Race Equality Charter) and consultations with staff and students.
21. EDI action plans are shaped by the University's strategic Equality groups which facilitate the implementation of recommended actions and ensure that Equality and Inclusion is a priority at the highest levels at the University. Each Equality group:
 - Monitors their relevant Equality Action Plan.
 - Functions as a strategic forum to shape plans and policies for long-term, strategic change.
 - Reports to the Wellbeing, Inclusion and Culture committee.
 - Aims to be made up of 50% Academic and 50% Professional Services Staff.
 - Is chaired by a member of the University Executive Board.
22. For more information on Equality Groups, their EDI action plans and accreditation please visit:
 - [The University of Exeter's equality, diversity and inclusion \(EDI\) website](#)
 - [Disability Equality Group](#)
 - [Gender Equality Group](#)
 - [Race Equality Group](#)
 - [Sexual Orientation Equality Group](#)
 - [Faith and Worldview Equality Group.](#)
23. In addition to the Equality groups, networks can provide advocacy support for staff and a forum to air issues to key representatives who can take these issues forward. Networks include:
 - Armed Forces Covenant
 - BME Network
 - Cornwall Disability Network
 - Disabled and Chronically Ill Network
 - International staff & PG network
 - Kemeneth (Cornwall) – LGBTQ+ staff network
 - LGBTQ+ Staff Network (Devon)
 - LGBTQ+ Society (Devon)
 - Neurodivergent and Disabled Students Society
 - Neurodiversity Café
 - Parents and Carers Networks
 - SU Pride Society (Cornwall)
 - Trans and Non-binary Café
 - Exeter Wellbeing Network
 - Cornwall Wellbeing Network
 - WISEnet: Women's network

People, Culture and Environment

24. The University's Strategy 2030 places people, culture and environment at the heart of institutional success. The "Our People" theme outlines a vision for a thriving, inclusive community where everyone is empowered to reach their potential. A key commitment of the strategy has been to create the Wellbeing Inclusion and Culture Committee (WICC) to support the University's strategic priorities and commitments. The WICC brings together colleagues to focus on the delivery of strategies for health and wellbeing, equality, diversity and inclusion, and colleague experience and development.
25. The work of the WICC sits under three themes, which have been informed by feedback from staff and students:
- [Facilitating a healthy, inclusive and high achieving student and colleague community](#)
 - [Supporting personal and professional development and creating pipelines into leadership](#)
 - [Enabling Freedom of Speech, a values-driven speak out culture, and good campus relations](#)
26. The WICC reports directly to the University Council. The committee is co-chaired by the Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (People and Culture) and Executive Divisional Director of Human Resources. It has a number of reporting groups (see Figure 1) that it coordinates with to ensure successful delivery across these strategies, including the Equality Groups. The WICC also brings together the work of the Faculty WICCs and the Professional Services WICC which work to deliver "Our People" strategic priorities across the University's faculties and directorates.

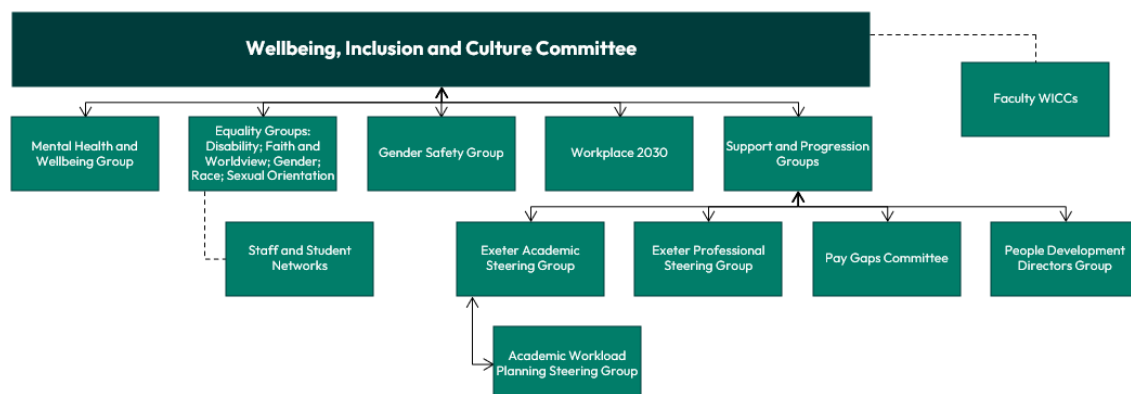


Figure 1: Governance flowchart for Wellbeing, Inclusion and Culture

Responsible Research Assessment

27. The University of Exeter supports sector-wide principles of responsible research assessment (RRA), including transparency, equity, and inclusivity in evaluating research contributions. The University is a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DoRA) and is now a member of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).
28. The University's Responsible Research Assessment Group leads on embedding RRA across the University, considering:
- Responsible metrics policies,
 - Human Resources policies and processes, through [Exeter Academic](#),
 - Research strategy,

- Culture, development and advocacy.
29. More information on Responsible Research Assessment can be found here: [Responsible metrics | Research Division | University of Exeter](#) and here: [Responsible research assessment | University of Exeter](#)
30. In alignment with the REF2029 guidance and the principles of RRA, this CoP promotes:
- Recognition of diverse research outputs and career paths.
 - Valuing interdisciplinary, collaborative, and applied research, alongside fundamental research.
 - Fair and consistent processes for identifying staff with significant responsibility for research and determining research independence.
 - Robust, transparent and inclusive processes for selecting representative and high-quality outputs for submission.
31. These principles ensure that the REF submission reflects the full breadth of research excellence at the University of Exeter, beyond traditional metrics and hierarchies.
32. The University of Exeter [Artificial Intelligence policy](#) sets out clear principles for using AI at Exeter. It supports innovation while ensuring fairness, transparency and compliance with data protection and ethical standards. Responsible AI use is vital for maintaining research integrity and will be reflected throughout Exeter's REF preparations.

Part-time and fixed-term contract staff

33. The University recognises the importance of supporting part-time and fixed-term contract research staff, who play a vital role in the research ecosystem but may face unique challenges in career progression and inclusion.
34. Institutional policies promote equitable access to development opportunities, mentoring, and recognition for all staff, regardless of contract type or working hours. Flexible working arrangements, pro-rata access to resources, and inclusion in departmental decision-making are key components of this support.
35. The University has instigated the Fair Employment For All (FEFA) programme to deliver an improved employee experience, supporting the recruitment, retention and development of staff to achieve Strategy 2030.
36. The programme has a number of key priorities:
- To significantly increase the use of permanent contracts of employment, recognising that fixed term contracts will be appropriate in a limited range of circumstances, such as cover for study leave and family leave.
 - Under the Race Equality Charter, to address the disproportionate number of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic academics on fixed-term contracts: [Diversify our Community | Equality, Diversity and Inclusion | University of Exeter](#)

The University of Exeter REF2029 Code of Practice

- To reduce the University's use of ad hoc working arrangements, including ensuring all regularly timetabled teaching is delivered by colleagues employed on standard contracts of employment.
 - To improve the working arrangements for Postgraduate Research Students employed as Postgraduate Teaching Associates.
37. The CoP ensures that part-time and fixed-term contract researchers are considered fairly in the identification of staff with SRR and in the selection of outputs and impact case studies, with due regard to their contractual context.

1.c) Actions taken since REF2021

38. The WICC has oversight of the institutional actions taken relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and reports directly to Council. It includes oversight of a series of action plans which are shaped by the University's equality groups (see para 62). Prior to the establishment of the WICC (academic year 2022/23), these responsibilities were held by the University Inclusivity Group.

Actions arising from our REF2021 Equality Impact Assessment

39. The University conducted an equality impact assessment (EIA) on its REF 2021 policies and Code of Practice at intervals throughout and immediately after the REF2021 cycle; the final EIA was completed in July 2021. While no negative impact or discrimination was found within the University's REF2021 submission, the EIA proposed a series of a short and long-term actions to ensure the continued progress of equality and diversity throughout the University. Actions arising from the EIA are outlined below.
40. **Research Culture and Researcher Concordat implementation plan workshops:** A series of departmental workshops took place over 2021/22 (with a follow up in 2022/23) that considered different aspects of research culture but more importantly provided a forum to focus on locally owned departmental action plans alongside influencing institutional policies and approaches.
41. Research culture action planning is now embedded at department level as part of the University's annual departmental review of research strategy, performance, and culture. Departmental annual review meetings are chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor Research and Impact (DVC R&I) and panel members include the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Impact (APVC-R&I) for each faculty, as well as the departmental Director or Research and Impact (DoRI) and Head of Department (HoD). Senior Faculty and department leadership members are also invited.
42. The University has again (2023) been awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award, held by Exeter since 2008. The award is based on an assessment of the University's progress and performance in meeting its institutional obligations to uphold the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.
43. **Research and EDI:** The University was able to invest (through Research England funds for Enhancing Research Culture) in a Research and EDI Manager post sitting in both the University's Research Services and the University EDI team, for twelve months. The post-holder was

responsible for facilitating a series of ‘deep dive’ sessions tackling specific issues and challenges within the context of researchers, research participants and research beneficiaries.

44. The deep dives took place between September 2021 and April 2022 and were centered on the 5 staff networks that existed at that time (BME, Disability, LGBTQ+, International & Gender). Meetings were attended by the DVC R&I, the Director of the Research Division, and the Chair of the Research and EDI working group, which reported directly to RIEC. A report and recommendations for further action went to RIEC for approval in November 2025 and will be available for all staff to view on the University’s internal Research Culture pages (see para 46).
45. The University has appointed a People Insights Manager within the EDI team to help relevant committees and equality groups understand the University’s staff profile and assist in identifying and monitoring actions in relation to increasing representation. The continued implementation of EDI actions is facilitated by the five equality groups (Disability, Gender, Race, Sexual Orientation and Faith and Worldview Equality groups), using the framework of associated external accreditations.
46. **Research Culture:** The University has developed a Research Culture [SharePoint](#) site that allows departments and researchers access to good practice in supporting an inclusive research environment. The site also includes a Research Culture in Grants [Toolkit](#) to support researchers integrate EDI and research culture considerations into grant applications. Through the Research England Enhancing Research Culture fund, the University was able to invest in a research dissemination officer role, who built a [suite of resources](#) to support good practice in research dissemination.
47. **Disclosure across protected characteristics:** Improving disclosure rates is now one of four University-level EDI related KPIs. In 2024 Sexual Orientation disclosure rates improved by 11% compared to March 2023, however Ethnicity disclosure rate reduced by 1%. Work continues with LGBTQ+ and Disability networks to promote disclosure and increase the number of staff disclosing. A sustained communications plan is in place through the Race Equality Group to drive and maintain a high ethnicity disclosure rate.
48. **Investing in and increasing availability of training and resources and mentorship and leadership opportunities:** Please see Appendix 7 for a list of training, resources and other opportunities available for staff. Over 650 staff have received Bystander training since it was introduced. The training has formed part of department research culture actions plans and through its targeted approach has positively impacted departmental culture, colleague morale and safety in calling out inappropriate behaviour. Student feedback indicates a desire for the University to make this training mandatory to address pervasive cultural issues. The effectiveness of the program has attracted interest from other HEIs, seeking insights on how to embed similar initiatives within their institution
49. Under the Enhancing Research Culture Fund the University was able deliver a Diversity, Inclusion, Cohesion and Equality (DICE) training programme for research leaders including supervisors, Directors of Postgraduate Research (DPGRs), Directors of Research & Impact (DoRIs), the Research and EDI Working Group and the Research and Impact Executive Committee (RIEC).

50. The University is continuing to support a variety of leadership and development programmes to embed diversity in senior leadership, including Aurora (Leadership development programme for women), 100 Black Women Professors NOW, Elevate (leadership and development programme for women from minority ethnic groups) and Stonewall LGBTQ+ Young Leaders Programme.
51. As a member of the GW4 Alliance (a collaborative alliance comprised of the University of Bath, University of Bristol, Cardiff University/Prifysgol Caerdydd and University of Exeter) the University also supports applications to GW4 Connect, a suite of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) programmes which brings together researchers from diverse backgrounds to form networks of support for marginalised and underrepresented communities in higher education.
52. **Responsible Metrics Policy:** The University established the Responsible Metrics Champions Group (now the Responsible Research Assessment Group) in 2019, as part of its commitments as a signatory of DoRA. The group has developed a set of Guiding Principles, and associated communications material to help colleagues better understand how to undertake RRA. The University has also recently joined The Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), as a sign of its commitment to reforming methods for research evaluation.
53. A Responsible Metrics Workshop has been embedded into the University's training provision for postgraduate researchers and academic staff; a similar workshop was also carried out as part of GW4 Open Research Week.
54. **Exeter Academic:** The University commissioned the Exeter Academic Review group (July 2022) to revise and adapt the progression and promotion structures for academic staff. Following extensive consultation with staff, it produced a set of 12 recommendations to simplify the promotions process and to make it more transparent and inclusive. The recommendations were implemented in a phased process over the 2023/24 and 2024/5 academic years. Further review will look to review application forms and to further embed Responsible Metrics into the promotion process.

Actions arising from our REF Lessons Learned Exercise

55. In addition to the actions arising from the EIA, the University instigated a REF2021 Lessons Learned activity, which took place during 2021. The exercise consulted widely, using surveys, workshops, and aggregation of feedback collected over the course of the REF2021 preparations. It looked at REF2021 preparations through the lens of People, Systems and Processes. Relevant recommendations and actions from the exercise are summarised below:
56. **Reshaping research monitoring:** A key recommendation was to reframe REF from being the goal, to being a consequence of the goal, and to achieve this by creating a nurturing, supportive and ambitious research culture, with greater emphasis on support, strategy and planning in the early years of the REF cycle and to avoid unnecessary grading and reviews. There was a need to focus on formative support for production and evaluation of high-quality outputs and impact through induction programmes, workshops, and accessible, bite-size training. Linked actions have included:
 - Separating research monitoring for the purposes of REF from departmental research performance review. Monitoring progress towards the REF 2029 submission is now undertaken principally at UoE REF Main Panel level and takes a phased approach over the

course of a REF cycle focusing on different aspects of UoA-level research performance and culture in a given year. Please see the section on Governance (Appendix 3).

- Departmental research strategy, performance, research culture and research impact & engagement culture are reviewed separately, in a series of departmental annual review meetings.
- Outputs review was paused until the 2023/24 academic year to allow for a focus on formative support for research quality through departmental research culture action plans. Output review is now once again an annual process but is not linked to individual performance and is for the purposes of supporting REF preparation. It is optional to participate, in recognition of the fact that staff will contribute different strengths at different times in the cycle, though we expect staff with suitable outputs to participate, where they can. For more detail on the outputs review process, please see Section 5.

57. **Training, support, clarity on roles and responsibilities:** It was recognised there was a need to build a clear responsibility matrix for those involved in decision making and REF preparation, along with a clear REF governance structure. To address this, a specific academic REF UoA Lead role has been created to support the REF submission at the UoA level. These roles align with units of assessment, which may span departments and/or faculties and have a holistic overview of the discipline across our organizational structure. For more details, please see the sections on the Roles and Responsibilities, throughout this document, and Governance in Appendix 3.
58. **Systems:** The exercise identified a need to lay the groundwork for improved information collection through user training, to configure systems to support research evaluation and the capture of diverse outputs, professional activities/prestige indicators and impact. This also included a need to update systems to improve researcher profiles and optimize document management. The University launched the Research and Impact Management Environment (RIME) in January 2023, which provides systems, guidance and other easily accessible online resources to support the complete research life cycle from conception to impact. This has been tailored to support diverse research outputs and interdisciplinary research. All staff and PGR students have access to the four RIME systems and linked resources, whilst UG and PGT students only have access to the Ethics module. The University launched an updated profile and [expert system finder](#) in 2024 that draws on data from RIME to provide public information on staff and PGR student research interests, collaboration interest, research outputs, teaching and other esteem indicators. A dedicated, private Research and Impact SharePoint site provides all information and relevant documentation to senior leadership, at Department, Faculty/Professional Services and University level, on aspects of research and impact including REF, strategy and performance, and culture.
59. **Communication:** It was recommended to update Exeter Academic to de-link REF from individual performance and provide resources/training to demystify REF, highlight the collective aspect of the submission and ensure all staff feel valued and appreciated for their contribution. Staff and PGR students now have access to dedicated REF SharePoint pages which provide information on the exercise, opportunities to participate (e.g. through the Code of Practice consultation) and details of the University REF2029 strategy and approach to submission.

Supporting actions arising from our Strategy 2030

60. From 2020 to 2021, the University held a series of “Big Conversations” with all staff and students. A key feature of the feedback was the importance of considering intersectionality in the context of wellbeing, inclusion, and culture policies.
61. All these activities directly informed the development of the University’s Strategy 2030 and in particular the “Our People” theme. This led to the establishment of the university-wide Wellbeing, Inclusion & Culture Committee (WICC), and appointment of a Deputy Vice-Chancellor for People & Culture to support the development of policy at the intersections of wellbeing, inclusion and culture.
62. Additional actions taken to support the People theme of our Strategy 2030 include the following:
- The establishment of Faculty and Professional Services WICCs that follow a defined WIC community of practice. Additionally, departmental directors of WIC contribute to the community of practice.
 - The implementation of strategic, university-wide key performance indicators (KPIs) based on reducing the gender pay gap, improving representation, increasing disclosure rates, and engaging and upskilling the community for inclusivity and belonging.

These KPIs are underpinned by large-scale project work across the university and benchmarked using established awards/initiatives:

- **Athena Swan:** The University renewed its Silver Award in 2024, underpinned by its gender equality action plan, which is monitored by the Gender Equality group. The action plan’s focus is on reducing the gender pay gap, strengthening Athena Swan engagement, enhancing governance and structures, addressing student and staff under-representation, addressing gender disparities, improving trans and non-binary inclusion and tackling bullying, harassment and gender-based violence. Currently 7 Schools/Departments hold Silver Awards: Psychology (awarded 2020), The University of Exeter Medical School (includes 3 departments, 2023), Biosciences (2023), Physics and Astronomy (2023), Ecology and Conservation (2023), Geography (2023) and Mathematics and Statistics (2025). 6 Schools/Departments hold Bronze Awards: Computer Science (2020), The University of Exeter Business School (includes 3 departments, 2021), History (2021), Engineering (2023), Earth and Environmental Science (2023) and Politics (2024). Other departments currently working on Athena Swan Bronze award applications are: English and Creative Writing, Law School, HASS Cornwall, School of Education and the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies.
- **The Race Equality Charter:** The University was awarded the Race Equality Charter Bronze award in 2022. The University’s Race Equality Charter aims to create a more inclusive and diverse University community, and it has identified five key priorities to drive this work forward: address racism on campus and local community, diversify the staff and student community, improve representation at senior leadership level, develop an inclusive culture and focus on inclusive education and practice. These priorities have shaped the Racial Equality Group action plan ([Our Five Priorities | Equality, Diversity and Inclusion | University of Exeter](#)).
- **Disability Confident:** The University has been awarded Level 2 Disability Confident Employer status. [The Disability Equality Group action plan](#) is closely linked to the Disability Confident accreditation scheme and is aligned around two themes: “Getting the right people” and “Keeping and developing people”.

- **Stonewall Workplace Equality Index:** The University achieved the Stonewall Silver Award in 2023. Feedback from the 2023 submission has helped inform the LGBTQ+ action plan for the [Sexual Orientation Equality Group \(SOEG\)](#) as well as help inform the activity of our LGBTQ+ Staff Networks. The action plan is focussed on: Data Collection and Monitoring, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Inclusive Policies, Allyship and Senior Leadership Engagement, Inclusive External Partnerships. The Workplace Equality Index (WEI) has recently been replaced as an accreditation with the Stonewall Proud Employers (PE) benchmarking and accreditation tool.
- Our **culture conversations** programme: The University has instigated an annual Colleague Experience Survey that uses a fixed set of ~20 questions grouped into People and Culture themes, which include workload, wellbeing, belonging and career progression. The results are presented to the University, faculty and professional service level WICCs who then work with leaders and managers across the institution to facilitate conversations and develop action plans that respond to the key feedback received. Some changes arising from the culture conversations include the launch of the Talent Innovation, Discovery and Engagement (TIDE) scheme for professional services colleagues, the launch of a university-wide mentoring scheme based on experience and need rather than roles and departments, better communication about wellbeing resources and development of an early resolution process.
- The University achieved its first **Mental Health Charter** award in 2025. To support its application and ongoing progress following accreditation, the University has developed a comprehensive action plan, based around 4 domains: Work, Live, Learn and Support. Actions implemented to date include the signposting of wellbeing resources during induction, the launch of the Wellbeing Network, which is open to all colleagues in the university and aimed at creating a supportive community to help people with their wellbeing, and the launch of a Supporting the Mental Wellbeing of your Staff course for anyone with responsibility for others, along with a set of dedicated “Colleague Wellbeing” web pages. In 2023, the University of Exeter won the Universities HR 2023 Award (Wellbeing category), for the work in developing this online training for colleagues as well as for its Colleague Mental Health Champions network.
- The University is a signatory to the **Technician Commitment** and has a dedicated 3-year action plan to support progress in improving Visibility, Recognition, Career Development and Sustainability of its Technical staff. In addition, within the 2023/24 academic year, the University launched its “Exe-Tech Strategy 2030”, a dedicated technical strategy for the future development of the university’s technical equipment, infrastructure, and people. Key achievements to date include the publication of the University’s attribution policy, which encourages the use of the CASRAI Credit taxonomy to ensure contribution can be mapped effectively, standardising job titles & descriptions across all grades to better focus on competencies and to promote the value of a technical career. In 2022 the University launched the Technical Strategy & Operations Competency Matrix. This system, built into Trent and the MI Hub, allows for each role within the service to be assigned various training requirements which allow that role to be fulfilled competently, and provides vital management information regarding compliance statistics.

Part 1: Conclusion

63. The University of Exeter’s REF2029 Code of Practice is designed to uphold the REF2029 principles of robustness, transparency, equity, and inclusion. It is also a reflection of the University’s strategic commitment to equality, inclusion, and responsible research culture. By aligning with

institutional policies and addressing key challenges, this CoP ensures that the REF process supports a fair, inclusive, and dynamic research community, as well as supporting research excellence.

PART 2 IDENTIFYING STAFF CONTRACTS WITH SIGNIFICANT RESPONSIBILITY FOR RESEARCH (SRR)

2.a) Policies and procedures

Criteria for SRR

64. REF2029 guidance notes that “the volume measure acts as a proxy measure to determine research capacity only.” The volume measure will be calculated using contract data held by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). As staff are no longer submitted to the REF, the volume measure’s importance is in determining the size and shape of the University’s submission and has no bearing on how staff will contribute, either directly or indirectly, to the University’s REF2029 submission
65. REF2029 guidance notes that “All eligible ‘teaching and research’ (ACEMPFUN3) contracts with significant responsibility for research (SRR) should be included in the REF2029 volume measure”.
66. **Definition of significant responsibility for research:** In the context of the University of Exeter, staff whose primary employment function is “teaching and research” are employed on the University’s Education and Research (E&R) contracts. The University of Exeter’s approach is that all staff with E&R contractual obligations meet the three REF2029 criteria of having significant responsibility for research, enabling them to engage actively in independent research, consistent with¹:
- “Explicit time and resources are made available”
 - “To engage actively in independent research”
 - “And that is an expectation of the job role”
67. **At the University of Exeter all staff on Education and Research contracts, irrespective of grade or work-load allocation, are deemed to have significant responsibility for research (SRR) in relation to the criteria above.**
68. Education and Scholarship contracts, also known as Teaching only (ACEMPFUN1) contracts for the purposes of HESA, are not eligible to be included in the volume measure calculation even if those contracts meet the tests for significant responsibility for research. Please see the REF2029 Volume measure guidance for more information²

Decision-making and communication

69. In the context of the approach outlined above, a decision-making process for identifying contracts with SRR is not required. The approach to SRR is communicated to staff via our REF SharePoint site.

2.b) Staff, Committees and Training

70. This section is not applicable in the context of Exeter’s approach to SRR as there is no decision-making process (and therefore no roles or committees) are involved in determining SRR.

2.c) Appeals

¹ <https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/section-3-volume-measure-guidance/#section-identifying-contracts-with-significant-responsibility-for-research-srr->

² [Section 3 – Volume Measure guidance – REF 2029](#) paragraph 6.0.4

71. An appeals process is not necessary in relation to SRR as Exeter's approach does not require decisions on individual contracts.

2.d) Equality Impact Assessment

72. No negative impacts have been identified from Exeter's approach to SRR.

PART 3 DETERMINING RESEARCH INDEPENDENCE

3.a) Policies and procedures

Criteria and Evidence

Definition of research independence

73. REF2029 guidance notes that “A ‘research only’ contract is considered to demonstrate research independence if the staff member undertakes self-directed research, rather than primarily carrying out another individual’s research programme.”
74. The REF2029 guidance provides example indicators to assist universities in establishing their own processes to assess research independence [see REF Guidance on Submissions 9.2]. As the REF2029 guidance notes, research independence should be considered persistent once identified.
75. For the avoidance of doubt, the REF2029 guidance notes that: “Research assistants are primarily employed to support another individuals’ research rather than pursuing independent research. They are usually funded from research grants or contracts from Research Councils, charities, the European Union (EU) or other overseas sources, industry, or other commercial enterprises, but they may also be funded from the institution’s own funds.” The REF2029 guidance also explicitly notes that simply being named on research outputs does not qualify a contract to be included in the volume measure.

Research-only contracts at Grade G (Senior Research Fellow) and above

76. Exeter Academic is the University’s framework for defining expectations of academic contracts whether Education and Research, Education and Scholarship or Research-only, at each grade level. Ability to progress to Grade G on a Research-only contract (Senior Research Fellow) or more senior grades (Associate Professor or Professor) requires evidence of having undertaken self-directed research with the expectation of having held external competitive fellowships or having a record of applying for externally funded research. It is an expectation of the role to ensure a continued focus on such independent research activity.
77. As such, at the University of Exeter, **all staff on Research-only contracts at Grade G (Senior Research Fellow) and above, irrespective of work-load allocation, are deemed to have met the test for significant responsibility for research as applied to staff on Education and Research contracts and to have met the criteria for research independence.**

Research-only contracts at Grade F (Postdoctoral Research Fellow/Research Fellow)

78. Staff on Grade F Research-only contracts, at the University of Exeter, are a combination of staff pursuing an independent programme of research and those employed on funded research projects as postdoctoral research fellows. Identification of research independence cannot be undertaken on contract type alone and therefore requires a consideration of the criteria, for each individual.
79. Identification of research independence and inclusion in the volume measure for those on Grade F is not a judgement on a given staff member’s independence of thought or ability to work independently. It is merely a judgement on whether the contract meets the criteria laid out in para. 85-86 below. It has no bearing on probation, progression or promotion within the University of Exeter. Such processes are governed by the Exeter Academic framework.

Research-only contracts at Grade E (Postdoctoral Research Assistant)

80. Research-only contracts at Grade E (Postdoctoral Research Assistant) do not afford the opportunity for wholly self-directed research programmes, as defined for REF2029, and therefore do not satisfy the REF definition of research independence.

Research-Enabling staff with an Employment function of “Not Teaching and Research”

81. The REF2029 guidance notes that “Only ‘Research Only’ and ‘Teaching and Research’ contract types will contribute to the volume measure calculation.” Therefore research-enabling staff with “Not Teaching and Research” contracts will not be eligible, even where their contracts meet the tests for significant responsibility for research.

Decision-Making and Communication

University of Exeter processes for assignment of research independence to Research-only staff on Grade F contracts

82. The following process is to support identification of those on Grade F Research-only contracts who undertake a self-directed programme of research. The process is coordinated centrally but undertaken primarily at department level, agnostic of the likely UoA to which the individual member of staff might be aligned. **Please note that once a status of research independence is confirmed it is considered permanent for the staff member, even if they move to other Grade F Research-only contracts during the REF period.**
83. **Periodic review of the list of Grade F Research-only contracts by Departments:** at least twice a year, Department Managers will receive a list of Grade F Research-only contracts that are identified as **not** having research independence, and will undertake initial review (based on evidence from research systems in relation to the stated criteria) on whether circumstances have changed and the criteria can now be applied, documenting in the HR system the reason by which research independence is now identified. These lists and underpinning evidence will be shared with Heads of Department for review and sign-off.
84. Where there might be uncertainty, for example where criteria can be assessed on a case-by-case basis (see para 85-86 below), these will be identified as requiring further review. Further review will be undertaken by Research Services (RS) Faculty partners and signed off by the relevant Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellors for Research and Impact. The review will focus on whether identified external funding or fellowships demonstrate research independence. RS Faculty Partners can discuss each case referred for review with the central REF team and can ask line-managers for additional evidence, where appropriate, to assist in decision-making.

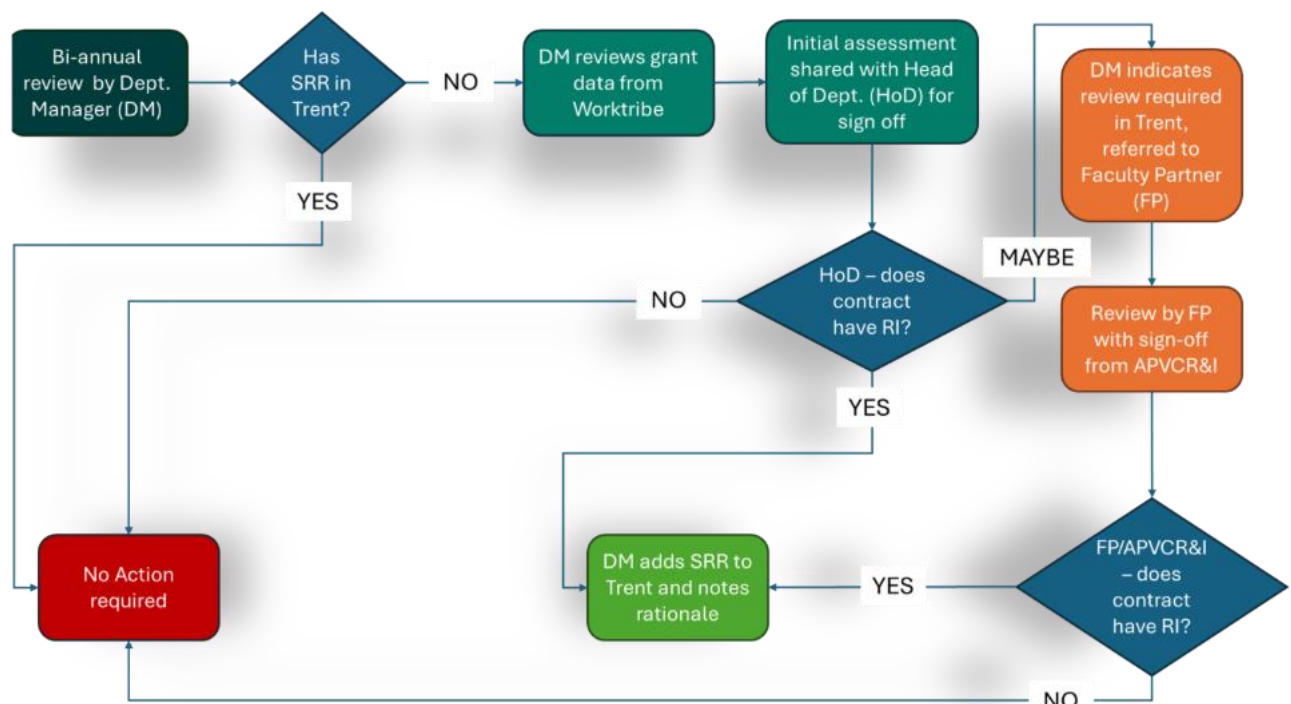


Figure 2: Visualisation of the process for identifying research independence within Grade F contracts

Criteria used by the University of Exeter to identify research independence for F-grade Research-only contracts

85. Meeting one of the criteria below will be sufficient for a contract to be identified as holding research independence.

- 1) Awarded an externally funded research project, as lead applicant (or co-applicant for those aligned to the disciplines within UoAs 14 – 33).
- 2) Hold an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship requiring research independence (as per fellowship schemes indicated as demonstrating research independence, listed within the REF guidance).
- 3) Lead a substantial/specialised work package: this criterion will be used exceptionally where there is demonstrable evidence of such a leadership role via Co-I status on an externally funded research project (noting that those with Co-I status aligned to UoAs 14-33, will already be flagged as having research independence in criteria 1).

86. All externally funded research grants are considered eligible with the following exceptions:

- Awards which are solely for travel, conferences and consumables will not be eligible
- Internally funded grants will not be eligible
- Fellowships which are not included in the REF2029 indicative list of eligible fellowships, or are included in this list but marked with an asterisk, will be considered on a case-by-case basis
- Awards relating to studentships, equipment, knowledge exchange or impact-related activities will be considered on a case-by-case basis, with eligibility focused on awards which clearly demonstrate that they are in support of that individual's self-directed research programme.

87. Data on applications/awards will be sourced from the University's grant capture tool, Worktribe, and initial decisions on these criteria will be made by department managers on the basis of the data provided. Data will include all relevant applicant roles within Worktribe, such as project lead (and research co-lead for Panels C&D), for research grants or fellowships. The Head of Department will review and ratify every decision.
88. **F-grade R-only staff outside of the Faculty structure:** The REF project team will review a list of relevant staff on a bi-annual basis using the criteria above; identification of research independence will be reviewed and ratified by the Head of Performance and REF. Any cases where there is lack of certainty are to be referred to the relevant Service Director for review. The Divisional Director of Research will review and ratify decisions made on any cases referred. This currently only applies to a subset of staff in Research Software and Analytics with R-only contracts.

Communication

89. Education and Research staff and those on Research-only contracts at Grade G and above (as there is an inherent expectation of research independence) are deemed to have significant responsibility for research and are included in the volume measure automatically. There is therefore no purpose for individual communication or for an appeals process.
90. For those on Grade F, where the identification process is undertaken regularly across a given year (see above), specific concerns were raised in the EIA on the validity of a communications process when, appropriately, the volume measure results in no consequences (positive or negative) for those on an R-only contract (see Appendix 1).
91. Identification of research independence, for the purpose of the REF, should not become seen as a proxy for quality or a marker of prestige to attain. Research independence status will therefore be treated as confidential, and an individual's status will only be shared with them on request to their Department Manager.

3.b) Staff, Committees, and Training

Roles and Responsibilities

92. **Department Manager:** is required to validate the criteria for research independence for staff on Grade F Research-only contracts within their departments. Their proximity to the individual staff members, the recruitment manager and their understanding of the staff members' contracts make them ideally placed to undertake that initial validation, supported by application and award data from our grant-management system. The Department Manager is also able to directly update the HR system with this information, making a note of the satisfaction of the applicable criteria. All outcomes of validation will be reviewed and approved by the Head of Department, before data is added to the HR system.
93. **Head of Department:** is required to review and ratify the initial assessment of research independence by the Department Manager, prior to data being added to the HR system. Any cases where there is lack of certainty are to be referred to the RS Faculty Partner.
94. **Research Services (RS) Faculty Partner:** The RS Faculty Partner is expected to review those cases which have been referred, i.e. where there is uncertainty if the contract meets the criteria above and determine the appropriate outcome, seeking additional evidence as needed. Once ratified by

the APVC-R&I, the outcome will be relayed to the Department Manager to update the HR system accordingly.

95. **Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research & Impact:** is required to review and ratify decisions made on any cases referred to the RS Faculty Partner.
96. **Head of Performance and REF:** is required to review and ratify research independence of F-grade R-only staff that sit outside the Faculty structure.
97. **Divisional Director of Research:** Review and ratify research independence decisions made on any cases referred for staff who sit outside the Faculty structure

Training

98. Guidance will be provided to Department Managers and Heads of Department with regard to interpreting the criteria appropriately. This will be shared with all those roles listed above. In addition, please see Appendix 7 for details of EDI training given to all decision makers.

3.c) Appeals

99. The REF2029 guidance asks institutions to consider putting an appeals process in place and to consider a communications process for research independence. On completion of the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA; see Appendix 1) this has raised some concerns regarding issues that might emerge from having an appeals process given the clear decoupling of people and outputs from volume measure considerations (i.e. individuals are not submitted to the REF and can no longer be considered “REFable”; an institutional communication on whether a researcher’s contract has been identified as ‘independent’ for REF purposes undermines the principle of decoupling and creates the perception that this status matters for purposes other than REF).
100. As noted in the communications section above, F-grade R-only staff may request their status from the Department Manager. Following this, the staff member can request that a decision on their status is referred to the RS Faculty Partner at the point of the next review, but only where the decision is in relation to the criteria for independence that allows for decisions on a case-by-case basis, namely:
 - Leading a work package where this is not reflected in Co-I status,
 - Award of a fellowship that is not on the REF fellowships list (or is on the list but flagged with an asterisk),
 - Where system information on PI or Co-I status is believed to be inaccurate or incomplete.
101. Staff members will be able to provide evidence that can be shared with RS Faculty Partners. Any review will take place as part of the Departmental and Faculty business-as-usual process for establishing research independence.
102. Where a staff member believes that the Code of Practice on establishing research independence hasn’t been followed correctly, they can lodge a formal appeal using the process laid out in Appendix 6. An appeal can be made independently of any request for status or review of research independence.

3.d) Equality Impact Assessment (EIA): Determining Research Independence

103. The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for the volume measure related processes can be found in Appendix 1.

104. All Education and Research contracts and Research-only contracts at Grade G and above were deemed to meet the criteria for significant responsibility for research, as all those on Research-only contracts at Grade G and above meet the criteria of research independence. No positive or negative consequences of these contracts being included in the volume measure were identified for individuals. This is especially the case given that there is no longer a minimum number of outputs required per individual (due to the de-linking of individuals from outputs in REF2029) and because there is no link to internal university promotion, probation or progression criteria, workload allocation or opportunities to undertake research.
105. For those on Research-only contracts at F-grade, it was also the case that there were neither negative nor positive consequences in relation to promotion, probation or progression nor changes in opportunities to undertake research, given the de-linking of volume measure from outputs submission.
106. However, concerns were raised about the perception of having met the research independence criteria and how it might be used inappropriately as a mark of prestige. It was thus felt that a formal appeals process, along with all the attendant tensions the process can bring, might further the view that being identified as having research independence is a marker of research quality. Instead, staff can request a review of their status, which will be undertaken as part of the business-as-usual process for establishing research independence, as outlined above.

Part 4: Allocating Contracts to UoAs

4.a) Policies and Procedures

Background context

107. The REF2029 volume measure determines the number of outputs and impact case studies to be returned for each Unit of Assessment (UoA). The volume measure is based on the number of eligible staff contracts that meet the criteria of significant responsibility for research or independent researcher (see Parts 2 & 3). This information will be provided within the University of Exeter's annual data submission to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).
108. For REF2029, the volume measure will be calculated as an average from the 2025/26 and the 2026/27 HESA returns. However, for future exercises, the volume measure will be calculated across all years of a REF cycle. As such, the process laid out below is intended to be used on an ongoing basis, ensuring that a UoA has been recorded for all eligible staff in the annual HESA return.

Criteria and evidence

109. For the purposes of the HESA submission, all Education and Research (E&R) and Research-only (R-only) staff must have a UoA returned against them, irrespective of whether they are flagged as having significant responsibility for research.
110. UoAs are assigned in Trent, the University's HR system, to each eligible contract held by a member of staff. This is the responsibility of the relevant department in which the contract is held.
111. Recognising the interdisciplinary nature of research undertaken at Exeter, there is provision for Trent to hold up to two UoAs for each member of staff, with a primary and secondary designation; only the primary UoA is returned as part of the HESA submission.
112. UoA allocation will be based primarily on information held within Trent, such as previous REF2021 or REF2014 assignment (where that information exists), or the reporting unit, if appropriate. The reporting unit is the lowest level of the University's organisational structure and indicates which department or departmental sub-discipline the role belongs to. A reporting unit is assigned to all roles as part of the recruitment process and may be more closely aligned with UoA descriptors than the broad, interdisciplinary focus of the department. For new staff, allocation can also be based on REF assignment at a previous institution, if shared at induction and relevant to the University's submission.

Decision-Making and Communication

Decision making

113. The REF2029 guidelines acknowledge that "eligible contracts cannot be perfectly mapped on to the 34 UoAs and that HEIs are best placed to determine the appropriate association of contracts to UoAs."

114. For staff based within Faculties, allocation will be made primarily on data held in Trent, however DoRIs and HoDs are best placed to understand the research strengths of the staff in the department and will assess whether staff have an optimal or additional fit to a UoA. Department Managers (DMs) are responsible for ensuring Trent is updated with the correct UoA allocations for eligible staff within their respective Departments.
115. UoA allocation will be updated as part of onboarding of new staff and will be reviewed at key points within the academic year, in preparation for the HESA submission in the Autumn of the following academic year.
116. For staff outside of the Faculty structure, the REF project team will review in June of each year, using the criteria above and ratified by the Head of Performance and REF. Any cases where there is lack of certainty are to be referred to the relevant Service Director for review. This currently only applies to a subset of staff in Research Software and Analytics with R-only contracts.
117. REF2029 UoA leads will be asked to annually review the allocation of contracts to their UoA, to assess whether the volume measure accurately reflects the research capacity of the UoA.
118. UoA leads can make recommendations on this, based on the information provided in para 114 to the degree of any adjustment required for the volume measure within UoA to the ADVC-RQ&I who will have a holistic overview of the UoA profile; overall UoA allocation will be discussed at the UoE REF Main Panels meetings.
119. The overall decision on whether and where contracts are to be re-allocated will be taken by UEB, following recommendation from RIEC and the ADVC-RQ&I, who holds strategic oversight the submission.
120. Where necessary staff contracts will be re-allocated to their secondary UoA, where it exists, or to another UoA of suitable fit, that can absorb the additional FTE without detriment to the quality of the submission. DMs will be responsible for making any necessary changes in Trent in time for the HESA submission.

Communication

121. Staff can request details from Department Managers of their UoA allocation, at any point in the process. This will be for information only as UoA allocation has no bearing on whether, how and where staff contribute to the REF, any promotion criteria in Exeter Academic or access to development and training.

4.b) Staff, Committees, and Training

Roles and responsibilities

122. **Department Manager:** is responsible for updating the HR system with a UoA allocation for all E&R and R-only staff within their department.
123. **Head of Department and Director of Research & Impact:** are responsible for providing the Department Manager with appropriate UoA allocations for new members of staff and reviewing UoA allocation for current staff with Department Managers prior to each HESA submission deadline.

124. **Head of Performance and REF:** is required to review and ratify UoA allocation for R-only staff that sit outside the Faculty structure.
125. **Divisional Director of Research:** Review and ratify UoA allocation for any cases referred, by the Head of Performance and REF, for staff who sit outside the Faculty structure.
126. **REF UoA leads:** REF UoA leads will review the volume measure for their respective UoAs and make recommendations as to how the overall volume measure can be adjusted.
127. **Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor(s) of Research and Impact:** APVC-R&I will review the volume measure for each UoAs within their faculty and make recommendations as to how the overall volume measure can be adjusted.
128. **Assistant Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research, Quality and Impact:** review UoA leads recommendations for adjustments to a UoAs volume measure and where appropriate seek approval from RIEC. RIEC will review and ratify recommendation made by the ADVC-R&I.
129. **REF Project Management Team:** update HR systems with UoA changes approved by RIEC.

Training

130. Guidance will be provided to all those roles listed above on the process. In addition, please see Appendix 7 for details of EDI training given to all decision makers.

4.c) Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

131. The University of Exeter values all UoAs equally. The decision on where to allocate contracts is a strategic one that reflects the University's research capacity, strengths and strategic aims of the institution. It is focussed entirely on the discipline and not the individual.
132. As noted above, UoA allocation does not influence whether individual staff will contribute to the REF or where their contributions will sit. UoA allocation is not considered in any promotion criteria within the Exeter Academic Framework and does not determine access to any support or development opportunities. All staff must have a UoA allocation as part of the HESA return and it is not considered in any element of decision making around significant responsibility for research or research independence, other than in relation to Co-I status and whether criteria 1 or 3 applies.
133. In conclusion, the University can find no negative impacts to staff in terms of decisions relating to UoA allocation.

Part 5: Selecting outputs

Background: REF Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU) Guidance and the University of Exeter context

REF Definition of outputs

134. For the purposes of REF2029, “Output” is any item which will be submitted for assessment to REF2029. The types of outputs which are permissible are wide-ranging and not limited to publications. The full list can be found in Annex K of the REF2021 *Guidance on Submissions*³, until such time as the REF2029 guidance is released.

REF guidance on eligibility of outputs

135. Eligible outputs are defined within the REF guidance as are those which meet the following criteria:

- The output must be the product of research, briefly defined as a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared.
- It must have first been brought into the public domain during the publication period **1st of January 2021 to the 31st of December 2028** or, if a confidential report, lodged with the body to whom it is confidential during this same period.
- If the output is a journal article or conference proceeding, it's within the scope of the Open Access policy, and must meet the requirements of that policy.
- The output must have a substantive link to the University of Exeter.

REF guidance on substantive link and eligible employment relationship

136. The substantive link will demonstrate that the University has enabled the research leading to the output. This will be primarily evidenced through demonstrating an **eligible employment relationship (EER)** of at least one author (or equivalent) who has made a significant research contribution to the output.

137. The eligible employment relationship (EER) is defined within the REF guidance as:

- A minimum of 0.2 FTE for at least 12 months continuous employment (as defined by Section 210 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA 1996) or the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996) by the University of Exeter (continuous employment may be demonstrated by a sequence of consecutive contracts) AND
- The role descriptor includes an explicit expectation of research activity (as distinct from scholarship) within the role.
- The EER can be considered to start at the beginning of the qualifying contract.

138. The EER must have occurred either:

- at the point of publication.
- or during a time-limited period before the point of publication, typically within the publication period.

139. The time-limited period is up to 2 years prior to the point of publication (or from the 1st of January 2021 up to the point of publication, if less than 2 years) for the majority of outputs.

³ [ref-2019_01-guidance-on-submissions.pdf](#)

140. For long-form or extended =process outputs, the time-limited period will up to 5 years prior to the point of publication (or from the 1st of January 2021 up to the point of publication, if less than 5 years). The REF2029 definition of what constitutes long-form/extended process is below

- **Long-form outputs** are defined as outputs of extended scale or scope.
- **Extended process outputs** are the culmination of a substantial, discrete research endeavour which, due to the nature of the approach or methodology, involved intense activity, sustained over a period of time, usually of five years or longer.

Policies relating to demonstrating the existence of an EER and substantive link between outputs and the University of Exeter will be outlined in Section 5.a below.

Outputs review at Exeter and its purpose

141. Output review at Exeter University is an annual exercise which allows units of assessment (UoAs) to consider their collective quality profile over the period of a year. Typically, this has included benchmarking of a selection of outputs by peers within the University of Exeter and/or by those appointed externally.

142. Staff with an expectation of research activity are invited to nominate outputs for consideration by up to three UoAs, which may then be assessed by the respective UoAs.

143. Outputs selected for review are given an indicative score using scoring criteria similar to that used in the REF process. Such scoring is intended to support REF preparations and an institutional understanding of REF readiness. The outcomes of the review are discussed at annual UoE REF Main Panel meetings replicating the REF Main Panel structure. At the meetings, individual indicative output scores are not discussed by the Panel. Scores are only discussed in aggregate in relation to overall unit preparedness.

5.a) Policies and Procedures

Identifying substantive link to outputs

144. If an EER exists at the point of publication (considered to be the date an output becomes first publicly available), for at least one author (or equivalent), that significantly contributed to the research leading to the output, the output will be considered to have a substantive link to the institution. All other eligibility criteria will still need to apply for the output to be considered for submission.

Staff on Education & Research (E&R) and Research-only (R-only) contracts

145. All E&R and R-only staff have an expectation of research activity within their job descriptions. This applies to all grades within these job families.

146. All E&R or R-only members of staff will be considered to have an EER with the University, if their contract (including multiple continuous contracts) is for 12 months or longer, at a minimum of 0.2FTE. The EER will exist from the start date of the qualifying contract.

147. The EER will continue so long as the staff member has continuous employment, in an eligible role, at a minimum of 0.2FTE.

148. Outputs authored by E&R and R-only members of staff and first made publicly available during the time period that the EER exists will be considered to have a substantive link to the institution.

149. Scenarios where there are changes to contract types, breaks in employment or reduction in FTE below 0.2FTE will be addressed in paras 165 to 171 below.

150. The designation of EER can be applied to former staff, however the rules around whether outputs can be considered for submission are outlined in paras 159 to 164 below.

Pre-publication time window

151. Any outputs authored by an E&R or R-only member of staff where the EER existed within a limited, pre-publication time-window (see para 139-140) prior to, but not at, the point the output first became publicly available, will be considered to have a substantive link to the institution.

152. The exception to this rule will be where staff have been made compulsorily redundant (please see para 164, below).

Staff on Education & Scholarship contracts (E&S)

153. For outputs sole-authored by, or where the only substantive link to the institutions is through staff in E&S roles (Teaching-only contracts, returned to the staff HESA record as ACEMPFUN1) Exeter will not consider these outputs as eligible for submission.

Other staff contracts (not teaching and/or teaching & research) with an expectation of research activity

154. "Research activity" is not restricted by profession, and an EER may exist for any staff member who undertakes, enables or supports research. Exeter will consider any output authored by other staff contracts, that have an explicit expectation of research activity (as distinct from scholarship) within the role, as eligible for submission.

155. The Technician Commitment working group supports staff working in all the key specialist services embedded across the institution where roles could be considered to be potentially "research active", in accordance with the description above.

156. The Technical Commitment working group will therefore have responsibility for identifying non-academic staff contracts with an explicit expectation of research activity, where staff nominate outputs. This will cover staff contracts within the following professional services:

- Technical Strategy & Operations,
- Research Software Engineers,
- The Library and Heritage Collections staff including Digital Humanities,
- IT Services,
- Digital.

Staff on all other contracts

157. Outputs sole-authored by, or where the only substantive link to the institution is through the following roles, are not eligible for submission, even if those staff have an expectation of research activity within their job role. Please see the REF CKU guidance (section 6.7 Exclusions) for details:

- postgraduate research students (including PhD theses)
- visiting or honorary staff (including Emeritus staff)
- individuals employed on academic or other contracts with no explicit expectation of research within the job role, such as those on technical teaching or support only contracts

158. This only applies to outputs produced when in an excluded role. If an EER previously existed, then the relevant rules will apply.

Selecting outputs where the substantive link is via former staff

Former staff

159. The REF2029 submission will be a reflection of the University's research excellence across the entire REF period. It may therefore wish to select outputs for submission where the sole substantive link is with staff who are no longer employed by the University at the time of submission. It will do so to ensure that the performance of all disciplines over the period of 2021 to 2028 has been appropriately represented, as well as to optimise the performance of disciplines. Where relevant, the University will be guided by the principle of mutual benefit and will follow the processes outlined below.

160. Co-authored outputs with substantive links to current member(s) of staff with an EER are not affected by the approach outlined below.

161. We will use the following definition for the categories of former staff for our REF2029 preparations:

- Category 1: Staff who have left the employment of the University voluntarily or have transferred to the employment of another organisation under Transfer of Regulations (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE);
- Category 2: Staff who are retired;
- Category 3: Staff who are deceased;
- Category 4: Staff who were employed by the University on one or more fixed term contracts of less than 21 months duration and whose employment ended on the expiry and non-renewal of that fixed term contract;
- Category 5: Staff whose employment has ended through the Exeter Release Scheme (TERS) or a voluntary severance arrangement;
- Category 6: Staff whose employment has ended due to either the expiry and non-renewal of fixed-term contract of more than 21 months duration or the requirement for work on an externally funded open-ended contract has come to an end and are subject to the University's redundancy procedure.
- Category 7: All other Staff whose employment with the University ended following the application of the University's Redundancy Procedure.

162. For the purposes of this Code of Practice, and for the avoidance of doubt, this definition of former staff does not include staff who have been dismissed for any other reason. The outputs of staff who have been dismissed for any other reason will not be considered for submission under any circumstances.

163. [Categories 1-6] Outputs solely associated with former staff in Categories 1 to 6 and produced during the REF period, will be considered available for selection to REF2029, where there was a substantive link to the University of Exeter, as evidenced by an EER existing at the point of publication or during the limited pre-publication time-window, in line with the procedure and policies outlined above and in the REF2029 guidance.

164. [Category 7] In line with REF guidance, outputs solely associated to staff made compulsorily redundant (other than Category 6 staff) will not be eligible for selection where those outputs are first made publicly available after the end of the employment contract and during the pre-

publication time window. Outputs which were published during the period that an EER existed at Exeter – the production of which was therefore supported by the University – will be considered to be available for selection for inclusion in REF2029, in line with considerations around representativeness.

Staff moving from ineligible to eligible contracts

165. According to the REF2029 CKU guidance, outputs where the sole substantive link is to an individual who was employed on an ineligible contract may become eligible for submission, if the individual subsequently moves to an eligible contract (e.g. from an E&S contract to an E&R or R-only contract) during the REF period. The contract will need to meet the definition of continuous employment, as defined by Section 210 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA 1996), and all other eligibility criteria would need to apply, as outlined above.

166. EER would exist from the first day of the continuous employment contract, including that of the ineligible contract. The University would consider outputs to be eligible, if the EER existed at the point of publication or in the limited pre-publication time window.

167. The only exception to this would be for staff who were PGRs at the point of publication or in the limited pre-publication time window; these outputs would not be considered for submission.

Staff moving from a role with an EER to an ineligible contract

168. When a staff member moves from a role with an existing EER to one which isn't eligible, or their contract changes to below 0.2 FTE, the EER will cease to exist on the date of the contract change.

169. Outputs published after this date would only be eligible if the EER existed in the limited pre-publication time window, in accordance with panel guidance and eligibility criteria.

170. Should the staff member move back to an eligible contract, during the REF period, the process outlined in para 165 above will apply.

Breaks in continuous employment

171. Where there is a break in employment, any EER would cease to exist on the date that continuous employment ceased. Should re-employment in an eligible contract occur, EER would be said to exist again once the eligibility criteria were met.

Assigning outputs to UoAs

172. Output assignments are best supported by insight from within the discipline structure. The REF UoA Lead will take responsibility for finalising the process for output selection and assignment, including the approach to review and moderation, in accordance with the University's general policy on selection, and review as laid out below. Templates and guidance will be provided, and this will be done in consultation with Directors of Research & Impact (DoRIs) from relevant departments, the relevant Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor(s) of Research and Impact (APVC-RI) and the Assistant Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research Quality and Impact (ADVC-RQ&I).

173. All UoAs will abide by the following principles:

REF UoA Leads will share details of the output assignment process (including nominations, review, moderation, selection and communication) and membership of the UoA output Selection Panel with all Staff (via our dedicated REF SharePoint communication site) no later than June 2027.

- If any individual with advisory or decision-making responsibility is conflicted (see Conflict of Interest Policy, Appendix 4) they will recuse themselves from that specific recommendation or decision.
- Each UoA lead will present a set of recommended outputs for submission to the UoE REF Main Panels review exercise in 2027 and, subsequently, an updated and final set of recommended outputs in 2028.
- Details of which outputs are selected for submission will not be shared with staff outside of the UoE REF Main Panel and central REF team.

174. Recommendations and decisions on the overall set of outputs to be submitted for each UoA will be underpinned by the review and moderation process (paras 180-181 below). UoA Leads will also be supported by data analysis relating to quality profiles and representativeness. The UoA-level decision makers will factor in available EDI data, open access data and representation across the research areas/research strategy as defined in the Strategy, People, and Research Environment (SPRE) statement.

Allocation of HESA ID to outputs

175. Where an output has more than one substantive link to the University, HESA IDs will be randomly assigned to the output, with the exception of cases where there is a need to demonstrate a significant research contribution, pending Panel guidance, and/or to ensure compliance with the recommended maximum of 5 outputs, per HESA ID, per unit submission.

Unit of Assessment (UoA) output selection processes and governance

176. Nomination of outputs for review: Exeter has an annual outputs review exercise, where staff nominate outputs via the University's central research information system, Symplectic Elements, using the system's assessment module.

177. Staff are typically given between 3-4 weeks to nominate outputs that represent their highest quality work. There is no limit on the number of outputs staff can nominate. Staff have the opportunity to include a self-assessment of the work and other relevant contextual information. They are also able to nominate each output for consideration by up to three UoAs. The exercise is open to all staff on E&R and R-only contracts, and other staff identified as having eligible employment contracts (see paras 154 to 156 above).

178. Unnominated outputs: The University will consider all eligible outputs to be suitable for inclusion in the pool of outputs to be considered for submission, regardless of whether they have been nominated or not, subject to the category of former staff (paras 159 to 164 above).

179. Triage: UoA Leads are provided with eligibility data for each output (including indication of a substantive link and open access related data). All eligible outputs nominated for a UoA as the first choice, during the outputs review exercise, are triaged for review, where they have a suitable fit to the UoA. UoA Leads have discretion as to whether to review unnominated outputs and those nominated to the UoA as second or third choice. They also have discretion to share outputs nominated to their UoA, with other UoA leads, as they deem appropriate.

180. Review: Each UoA Lead undertakes a peer review process. Nominated outputs are reviewed by research staff, across the institution, with disciplinary expertise. The purpose of this review is to provide an indicative scoring of the output in relation to REF criteria. Where a reviewer feels it is appropriate, they can provide qualitative feedback on the originality, significance and rigour of the

output. The reviewer may also consider “fit” within the remit of the UoA and whether the output should be put forward for double-weighting. Indicative grades are provided for each output on an 11-point scale of: U, 1, 2L, 2M, 2H, 3L, 3M, 3L, 4L, 4M and 4H. Reviews are shared with UoA Leads, with final grades subject to a moderation process (outlined below).

181. Moderation: Following review each UoA will apply a moderation process. Moderation practices can vary and might include a UoA Moderation Panel, external reviewers or the final moderation being undertaken by the REF UoA lead.
182. Following moderation, a single indicative grade from the 11-point scale is given to the output and added to a SharePoint list that holds all outputs nominated for, or assigned to, the UoA. The SharePoint lists do not contain details of who has nominated an output (other than the list of current staff who are flagged as authors in Symplectic Elements) and access is restricted to the relevant UoA Leads, Faculty senior leadership and the REF project team. This single indicative grade is used to populate UoA level dashboards that include a putative quality profile for the UoA and form the basis for discussion at UoE Main Panel meetings. The profile is considered in aggregate and individual grades are not discussed.
183. Selection of outputs for REF2029 will be made by a UoA Selection Panel. UoA Selection Panel membership will include the REF UoA Lead, discipline experts and senior research leaders. Outputs will only be considered if they have gone through the review and moderation process outlined above.
184. Phase 1 in 2027, the Selection Panel will review the outputs gathered to date, consider the indicative grades from the annual outputs review exercise and generate a list of outputs for submission. This exercise will begin in June and conclude by July 2027.
185. Phase 2 in the Summer 2028 after the 2027/28 annual review exercise, the Selection Panel will consider any further outputs in press or published since 2027 to be added to the list of outputs for submission.
186. A series of UoE REF Main Panel meetings, chaired by the ADVC-R&I and attended by panel REF UoA Leads, relevant Faculty APVC-R&I and the central REF project team will take place each summer to review and approve the UoA output submission.
187. Open access data and data to support assessment of the representativeness of the outputs in the context of the considerations set out below (paras 217 to 222) will be made available at all decision points.

Communication

188. Staff will not be informed if an output nominated by them has been selected for submission.
189. Annually, following the nominations and review process, feedback will be made available to nominating authors via Symplectic Elements.
190. Feedback is to be used entirely for the purposes of supporting research quality and cannot be used for probation, promotion or performance purposes. For the policy on sharing feedback, including indicative grades, please see Appendix 9.

191. UoA Leads will share details of the review, moderation and selection process through all-staff SharePoint communication sites and are encouraged to have discipline-wide meetings to highlight the key change within REF2029 of the total decoupling of individuals from the outputs submitted. They are strongly urged to consider the submission as a collective effort towards putting forward a selection of the highest quality outputs produced, that best represents the submitting unit.

Interdisciplinary research

192. For the purposes of the REF, interdisciplinary research is understood to achieve outcomes (including new approaches) that could not be achieved within the framework of a single discipline. Interdisciplinary research features significant interaction between two or more disciplines and/or moves beyond established disciplinary foundations in applying or integrating research approaches from other disciplines.

193. The University recognises and values all forms of excellent research including interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and collaborative research and supports all such research through its interdisciplinary institutes, networks, centers and departments.

194. This approach is embedded within the key vision of the University's Strategy 2030, which is to build on the University's strong interdisciplinary culture to lead meaningful action against the climate emergency and ecological crisis, make key breakthroughs to transform human health and wellbeing and to lead the progress towards creating a fair, socially just and inclusive society.

195. Within the outputs review exercise, invited staff can identify up to three UoAs for each output nominated, and provide additional contextual information that is shared with each relevant REF UoA lead at the triage stage. Outputs may be reviewed by all nominated UoAs and any others that are deemed suitable.

196. REF UoA Leads can request outputs to be reviewed by appropriate internal and external staff as well as seek advice from other REF UoA Leads and the REF project team.

197. The selection process for each UoA will balance quality with representativeness (see para 217 below), within the confines of the UoA descriptors. The CKU guidance notes that it "is anticipated that UoA descriptors will be sufficiently broad to allow interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary outputs to be meaningfully aligned with the appropriate disciplinary areas". An output will be assessed separately for each UoA it is submitted to and may score differently in each case.

198. Where an interdisciplinary output is being considered for submission, the REF UoA lead may wish to request a cross-referral to another UoA sub-panel.

199. The CKU guidance notes that "a request to the sub-panel to consider cross-referring the output to another sub-panel for advice...does not indicate incorrect allocation to a UoA".

200. Cross-referral requests must be discussed at the UoA Selection Panel and agreed by the UoE REF Main Panel.

Submitting an output to multiple UoAs

201. An output can be included in the submission to multiple UoAs from the same institution, where the output meaningfully aligns with the disciplinary areas defined by each of the UoA's descriptors.

202. Nominated outputs can be aligned to up to three UoAs and REF UoA Leads will have access to the entire institutional outputs pool to identify potential outputs; they can also share outputs with other UoA Leads as appropriate. UoA Selection Panels will discuss alignment of each output in the submission list with the UoA descriptors, as part of their selection process.

203. Where an output is submitted to more than two UoAs, the output will be discussed at the relevant UoE REF Main Panel meeting. UoA Leads will be asked to provide a summary of how the output aligns with UoA descriptors, the quality and representativeness of the output. A final decision on which Main Panel UoA, if any, the output should be submitted to, will be made at the UoE REF Main Panel.

Procedures for supporting diversity of outputs

204. The University of Exeter recognises and values a plurality of research approaches and research outputs. It understands that supporting diverse, dynamic, innovative and interdisciplinary research is vital in delivering on its Strategy 2030 ambitions to tackle societal challenges at a local, national and international level.

205. All University of Exeter staff and post-graduate researchers are asked to log research activity on the University's Current Research Information System (CRIS). The CRIS includes 24 distinct output types, including a catch-all type of Other:

- Book
- Chapter
- Dataset
- Conference
- Journal article
- Working paper
- Patent
- Report
- Software / Code
- Performance
- Composition
- Preprint
- Design
- Artefact
- Exhibition
- Digital/ Internet publication
- Scholarly edition
- Poster
- Thesis / Dissertation
- Other
- Figure
- Fileset
- Media
- Presentation

206. The metadata associated with each output type has been configured to ensure it captures relevant information to support responsible research assessment for each output type. This allows staff to log the full range of their research activity and output types as well as potentially deposit diverse outputs to the University's open access repository ORE (Open Research Exeter). All research output types can be shared publicly via the University's profile system, [Discovery](#).

207. Exeter Academic is the University of Exeter's framework for probation and career development for academic staff. Staff in E&R or R-only job families are assessed on a number of research-related criteria including the production of high-quality research outputs, categorised into:

- Books – authored, edited (including conference proceedings)
- Chapters in books (including self-edited ones)
- Papers in journals
- Review articles in journals
- Book reviews
- Official reports
- General editorship of journals and series

- Working papers
- Research through practice
- Any Other type of output (e.g. Government reports; patents; videos, films, recordings)

208. As a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DoRA), the University is committed to the fair and responsible assessment of research for recruitment and promotion purposes.

209. The Exeter Academic [Responsible Metrics Reviewer Guide](#) provides probation and promotion panel assessors with the considerations needed to ensure that they are both fair to candidates and are upholding the university's commitments to responsible metrics and to DoRA.

210. Assessors are required to “consider the value and impact of all research outputs (including datasets and software) in addition to research publications”, as well as to “consider a broad range of impact measures including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice”, in line with the University’s institutional commitment to fair and responsible research assessment under DoRA.

211. The Responsible Research Assessment group provides an [indicator toolkit](#) to support responsible research assessment, to be used in line with its [guiding principles](#):

- Quantitative indicators should not be used where they are not appropriate
- Respect disciplinary diversity: do not use identical indicators to compare different subjects
- Uphold the principles of DoRA & the broader responsible metrics agenda: avoid using
- Avoid using indicators to compare individual researchers which do not account for individual circumstances
- Ensure that indicators are applied at the correct scale of the subject of investigation
- Apply the use of quantitative goals or benchmarks appropriately
- Use quantitative indicators which are widely used and understood
- Avoid indicators becoming the target of research activity at the expense of research quality
- Adoption of new indicators must be used in keeping with these principles

212. In addition to the above, Faculty and Department research culture activities include workshops to support the production and assessment of diverse research outputs. In 2025, we facilitated a workshop with the [Hidden REF](#) to explore diverse research outputs, the hidden roles that go into creating them and approaches to evaluation. This was open to the whole research community as an opportunity to “train the trainer” and enable the University to continue delivering workshops over the entire REF cycle and beyond.

Consideration for selection

213. The nominations process is open to all output types within the University’s CRIS and there are no restrictions on the language of the output or contextual information provided. Staff nominating

outputs are encouraged to provide a self-assessment of the originality, significance and rigour for each nominated output and to provide additional contextual information to assist research assessment.

214. UoA leads are able to provide specific disciplinary guidance for a range of research output types as part of the guidance offered to staff during the nominations process.
215. UoA leads are aware of their commitments to DoRA and implementing a responsible research assessment process and are expected to provide disciplinary-relevant guidance to peer-reviewers involved in the process. The central REF Team will provide a set of guidance for reviewers that includes consideration of responsible metrics, alongside the guidance provided by Exeter Academic on responsible research assessment. Where necessary, the University of Exeter will recruit external expertise to support review of the full range of output types and languages included in the potential output pool.
216. Outputs will be reviewed and considered for selection on their own merits, irrespective of output type. As described in above, UoA leads are best placed to understand the range of output types produced by their discipline and to ensure that the final selection is a representative high-quality sample of the diverse range of outputs produced by the unit over the REF cycle.

Procedures for ensuring submissions are representative of the research undertaken within the submitting unit during the REF period

217. Each UoA Selection Panel is asked to consider the following questions when recommending the final set of outputs for submission, to ensure that the submission is both of the highest quality and representative of the research activity undertaken during the REF2029 period.
218. **Quality:** Is this set of outputs reflective of the highest quality outputs produced during the REF2029 period?
219. **Representation of research activity:** The UoA is asked to consider whether, *without significantly impacting the quality profile*, the following aspects of the submitting unit are appropriately represented in the selection of outputs:
220. **Research structures and areas:** Do the outputs represent the diverse range of research activities consistent with the UoA strategies and structures? Are there research structures and/or areas that are disproportionately represented? If so, are there appropriate ways to rebalance this within the submission?
221. **Output types:** do the outputs reflect the full range of output types that contribute to the UoA across the University? If not, are there appropriate ways to rebalance this within the submission?
222. **Strategy, Collaborations & Partnerships:** are the outputs representative of the full range of significant collaborations and partnerships and research strategies that define the UoA? Are they aligned to the structure that make up the unit including themes, Institute's and centers? If not, are there appropriate ways to rebalance this within the submission?

223. UoA Output selection panels will also consider the recommended maximum limit of 5 outputs that can be submitted per individual substantive link⁴
224. UoA Selection Panels are best placed to define the UoA representation and will be responsible for drafting the UoA-level SPRE statement that will include the description of the UoA. UoA Selection Panels will use this description as a benchmark to assess representativeness and the need for re-balancing.
225. UoA Selection Panels will report on the representativeness of their outputs to UoE REF Main Panel detailing any rebalancing required and the UoAs approach. UoE REF Main Panels may request further rebalancing if they determine that the submission does not adequately reflect the submitting unit. These reports will also inform the narrative on representativeness to be included in the UoA-level SPRE statement.
226. Data will be provided to support Selection Panel decisions. This may include information on output type, unit structure, linked grants, acknowledgments, affiliations, EDI characteristics (as required to support any narrative around representativeness), and contextual information from nominations. The central REF team will collate and share this data via SharePoint lists.
227. Data will not explicitly identify staff with a substantive link to output and will be handled in line with our commitment to responsible research assessment.

Policies and procedures and responsible research assessment practice

228. As noted in Section 1, the University of Exeter is committed to embedding responsible research assessment in all its REF2029 policies and processes. As a signatory to DoRA and member of CoARA, the University is committed to bringing about change to ensure metrics are used responsibly.
229. The University has an agreed set of principles for the responsible use of metrics, as developed by the Responsible Research Assessment group. This has informed decisions on what data can be shared with decision makers. As an example, output metadata such as Journal title or Journal Impact factor has not been included in the SharePoint lists, detailing nominations. Citation data will only ever be shared with relevant staff (see roles and responsibilities, below) in strict accordance with sub-panel guidance, where it is allowed.
230. Responsible research assessment and the use of metrics has formed part of the REF UoA Lead induction process and discussions/knowledge are regularly refreshed through presentations at UoA lead forums and through the mandatory training given to all roles involved in the REF process. The appropriate use of metrics for triage, review and calibration is discussed at UoE REF Main Panel meetings.
231. All staff have access to the guidance on the responsible use of metrics and research assessment and are asked to apply these principles when conducting internal review of outputs for the purposes of the REF.

5.b) Staff, Committees and Training

⁴ <https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/section-4-contributions-to-knowledge-and-understanding-cku-guidance/#section-representative-submissions>

Roles and Responsibilities: selecting outputs

232. **REF UoA Lead:** is responsible for organising review, setting out the UoA process for moderation and final recommendations for selection, convening and chairing the UoA selection panel, building a representative and diverse pool of outputs for selection, providing indicative grades and reporting on these processes to the UoE REF Main Panel meetings.
233. **Head of Performance & REF:** is responsible for the processes linked to eligibility of outputs (e.g. the EER), compliance with policy (e.g. compliance with the REF2029 open access policy) and ratifying the EER of Faculty-based contracts flagged as being the substantive link for outputs selected for submission. They also oversee the annual outputs review exercise.
234. **REF2029 Project Coordinator:** will provide evidence for audit requests in relation to compliance with the REF2029 EER and open access policies.
235. **Technicians Commitment Working Group:** is expected to review and ratify the EER of any non-Faculty based contract flagged as being the substantive link for outputs selected for submission
236. **Assistant Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research, Quality & Impact:** has overall responsibility for the submission, review and ratification of all UoA CKU submissions, as approved by RIEC/UEB

Training: selecting outputs

237. Guidance will be provided to all those roles listed above on the process. In addition, please see Appendix 7 for details of EDI training given to all decision makers.

5.c) Equality Impact Assessment

238. The Equality Impact Assessment for output selection can be found in Appendix 1. No positive or negative impacts were found for individuals in relation to the output selection process. This is especially the case given the de-coupling of individuals from outputs in REF2029 and because output selection has no link to internal university promotion, probation or progression criteria, workload allocation or opportunities to undertake research.
239. However, there was evidence that staff on R-only contracts were not engaging with the output nomination process. There was also concern around the potential for unconscious bias to impact decision making around selection of outputs. It was also noted that the perception of being “REF-able” may place an undue value on an individual’s outputs being included in the submission, despite the emphasis being placed on the collective nature of the exercise, and there are still misconceptions that REF assessment can support promotion, partly due to the use of REF language (e.g. “world leading”, “internationally excellent”) in Exeter Academic.
240. To address these concerns, the following mitigating actions will be taken:
- Understand and mitigate barriers to participation of Research only and Technical Staff in the output review exercise
 - Bespoke EDI training for REF decision-makers at the University, planned for the first half of 2026/27
 - Provide appropriate EDI data to decision-makers, planned for 2027 and 2028
 - Communications to decision-makers and nominating authors to reiterate that REF processes are not intended to assess individuals and the confidentiality of REF grades on nominated outputs

- In coordination with the Responsible Research Assessment Champion group, contribute to further review of Exeter Academic with the aim of modifying inappropriate use of REF-specific language in the current Exeter Academic promotion criteria.

Part 6. Appendices

Content of Appendices

6.a) Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 1: Equality Impact Assessment

6.b) Referenced material in the CoP

Appendix 2: Selection of Impact case studies

Appendix 3: Governance, roles and responsibilities for decision-making

Appendix 4: Conflicts of Interest policy

Appendix 5: Confidentiality policy

Appendix 6: Appeals policy and process

Appendix 7: EDI training approach

Appendix 8: Consultation and communication plan for CoP

Appendix 9: REF Outputs Monitoring and Review: Policy on Use of Output Grades

Appendix 1: Equality Impact Assessment

University of Exeter REF2029 Equality Impact Assessment

A. Summary

1. The University of Exeter is committed to preparing for, and delivering, REF2029 in a robust, fair, inclusive and transparent way. Its REF2029 Code of Practice is being developed and implemented in the spirit of our institutional values of Discovery, Respect, Excellence, Inclusion and Community.
2. An iterative Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process, developed jointly by the Research Services Directorate and the Wellbeing, Inclusion and Culture Team will ensure that EDI is integral to the development and implementation of the University's REF2029 Code of Practice and subsequent REF2029 processes.
3. The key REF processes analysed here relate to eligibility of contracts for volume measure, output selection and impact case study selection, including:
 - a. **Identifying contracts with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR)**
 - b. **Determining Research Independence (RI)**
 - c. **Allocation of contracts to Units of Assessment (UoAs)**
 - d. **Process for nomination, triage and selection of outputs**
 - e. **Process for identification and prioritisation of REF impact case studies**
4. For the purpose of this Equality Impact Assessment, we focused on issues relating to protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex). However, there are limitations on what data can be collected systematically. Our institutional data collection is modelled on data provided to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and, therefore, upon recruitment we collect data on age, disability, legal sex and ethnicity. Collection of data on religion or belief and sexual orientation relies on individuals updating personal records on our HR system (Trent), therefore disclosure rates tend to be low. Similar to the HESA data collection, we do not collect data systematically relating to marriage or civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity leave (except in relation to family-related leave requests), hence it was not possible to include these characteristics in the data below. The low disclosure rate precludes us from drawing meaningful trends, but we will test our processes and systems through engagement with lived experience groups. With regards to sexual orientation, currently 80% of Education and Research (E&R) staff and 85% of Research only (R-only) staff have not disclosed personal information. Therefore, we do not hold enough information about sexual orientation in the research community to perform an adequate analysis of this protected characteristic. Finally, we recognise that intersection of different protected characteristics can affect how biases manifest for different individuals. However, we do have data from our colleague experience survey which can offer some trend data with an intersectional lens.
5. The Equality Impact Assessment is a living document which will continue to be updated as assessments are carried out at key intervals, in accordance with the Funding Councils' requirements.
6. While the present analysis has found no actual disproportionate impacts, this document notes areas where there may be perceived negative impacts that require mitigation and where there may be further opportunities to increase equity of opportunity. Alongside the training plan proposed in the Code of Practice for all REF decision makers, the document notes recommended mitigating actions and how the University will implement and monitor these, to further promote equity of opportunity for different groups in the research community.

B. Interdependence with other projects or pieces of work

7. This document is being developed simultaneously with the REF2029 Code of Practice. The two documents inform each other, as recommended in the EIA guidance provided by REF.

C. Processes relating to Volume Measure

8. In REF2021 institutions submitted individual staff to the assessment exercise. Eligibility for REF submission was determined by whether a staff member had Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) and was an independent researcher. Research capacity, now called volume measure, was calculated as the FTE of eligible employed staff at a single census date (i.e., 31st July of the final year of that particular REF cycle). For REF2029, individuals will not be submitted to the assessment exercise. Instead, the volume of activity in disciplinary areas within HEIs will be calculated using an average full-time equivalent (FTE) of eligible staff across the academic years 25/26 and 26/27. Data will be collected from the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) records, where eligibility will be recorded (the REFQUALCON field in HESA staff records set to “01” for eligible staff). As stated in the REF2029 guidance⁵, ‘volume measure will be calculated using the percentage of a full-time equivalent year of contracts that have **significant responsibility for research** (SRR) and **research independence** (RI)’. There is no requirement for eligible staff to submit outputs, nor will output submission be restricted to the outputs and impacts associated with eligible staff. It is confirmed that future REFs will use data from across the full assessment period.

Determining individuals’ ‘research independence’ status (RI)

9. For all staff on E&R contracts at the University of Exeter, significant responsibility for research is an expectation of the job role, hence all E&R staff will be flagged as having SRR in HESA records. Under REF2029 guidance, staff on grade G and above R-only contracts meet the criteria for RI, as research independence and successful award of funding are inherent expectations of the contract and described in the Exeter Academic Promotion Criteria⁶. In January 2025, a bulk exercise was undertaken to update HESA records (REFQUALCON field) for all grade G and above R-only staff from February 2024 to January 2025. For new hires after this exercise, the responsibility for updating records on the University’s HR system (Trent) which feed into HESA records will be within the department as per the agreed Code of Practice. It is anticipated that it will be undertaken by Department Managers, in discussion with Heads of Department.
10. A new process is required to determine whether current and new members of staff on grade F R-only contracts are eligible to be included in volume measure calculations for REF. Neither the current wording on contracts nor job descriptions differentiates those who might be on research fellow roles which assume research independence from those who might be postdoctoral research associates working to somebody else’s research programme. Hence a case-by-case approach needs to be taken, according to the eligibility criteria below. This document will continue to be updated to reflect work in this area, most notably the audit by Price Waterhouse Cooper on staff data processes for the HESA submission, taking place in 2025, which may provide recommendations on how to ensure alignment of job descriptions and HESA records and training requirements.
11. The eligibility criteria, finalised post-consultation in September 2025, determine that the following staff on grade F R-only contracts should be identified as holding research independence:

⁵ <https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/section-3-volume-measure-guidance/>

⁶

https://www.exeter.ac.uk/v8media/currentstaff/exeteracademic/documents/Exeter_Academic_Promotions_Criteria_v3.pdf

- 1) lead applicants (and co-applicant for those aligned to the disciplines within UoA 13 – 34) on an awarded externally funded project (excluding internal funding, ISSF or solely for travel, conferences or consumables) or
 - 2) holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship requiring research independence.
 - 3) Lead a substantial/specialised work package: this criterion will be used exceptionally where there is demonstrable evidence of such a leadership role via Co-I status on an externally funded research project
12. The process to update and maintain accurate records as new awards are received and new staff are hired, has been discussed at the Research and Impact Executive Committee's REF workshop of 18th September 2024. As per the Code of Practice, for 2025/26 onwards Department Managers will be asked to review bi-annually all Grade F Research-only contracts which are not, at that point, listed as having research independence against the criteria listed in the Code of Practice; and, with sign-off from the Head of Department to update it within the HR system. Department Managers and Heads of Department can refer cases where they are uncertain to the faculty partners. RS Faculty partners will review any such case, with sign-off from the APVCs R&I.

Allocation of contracts to Units of Assessment

13. All E&R and R-only staff must have a Unit of Assessment (UoA) returned in Trent for the purpose of the HESA submission. Correct UoA assignment is the responsibility of the department in which the contract is held. For new staff members, this is typically done shortly after appointment as part of the onboarding process. UoA allocation will be based primarily on information held within Trent, such as previous REF2021 or REF2014 assignment (where that information exists), or the reporting unit, if appropriate, however DoRIs and HoDs are best placed to understand the research strengths of the staff in the department and whether they have an optimal or additional fit to a UoA. The system can hold up to two UoAs, in recognition of the interdisciplinary nature of the research undertaken at Exeter.
14. UoA leads will review UoA allocation following HESA submission and may make recommendations, for discussion in REF Main Panel meetings, as to adjustments required for the volume measure to accurately reflect the research capacity of the UoA. Decision on re-allocation of contracts will be taken by the ADVC-RQ&I.
15. Staff may request their UoA allocation details from Department Managers at any time, but this is for information only and does not affect REF contributions, promotion, or access to development opportunities.

D. Analysis of impacts identified for protected characteristics due to processes related to Volume Measure

Research Independence

16. As outlined in the Future Research Assessment Programme (FRAP) provisional Equality Impact Assessment⁷, the decision to break the link between REF submissions and individuals is likely to have positive effects for characteristics that were previously underrepresented in the submitted output pool, as outputs can be drawn from a wider pool of staff regardless of their inclusion in volume measure. There should also be less incentive to attempt to game volume measure calculations by hiring 'REF-returnable' staff shortly before the REF census date,

⁷ <https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/9145/1/future-research-assessment-programme-provisional-equality-impact-assessment.pdf>

because volume measure is calculated as an average FTE of eligible staff across 25/26 and 26/27.

17. Hence, the process of identifying staff with RI should not have direct consequences for any of the protected characteristics. However, there could be consequences if information on individual RI-status is shared and perceptions associated with having, or not having, RI status influence a) promotion/recruitment decisions, b) being valued within departments, c) support offered to pursue independent research. These consequences hinge on how widely information on individual RI-status is shared. We focus our analysis on potential repercussions for grade F, R-only staff.
18. **Promotion/recruitment decisions:** RI-status may be conflated (by the affected staff or by senior leadership) with having an independent research profile, leading to the perception that staff with RI are more likely to secure permanent lectureships/senior lectureships or promotions than someone without RI status. This could lead to staff without RI status being discouraged (either by their own perceptions or the perceptions of others) from applying for an E&R lectureship post or promotion. This would be unfortunate when the Research Independence status might have been circumstantial in their previous role. It is a consideration that where this coincides with those in minoritised communities this reticence might be further exacerbated.
19. **Being valued within a department:** if information on RI-status is shared beyond decision-makers and individual staff, it could affect perceptions of value of affected staff. Individuals themselves could regard their contributions as more/less valuable and take RI-status as an indication that they are regarded by their peers as more/less capable of independent research. If this reflects a reality where other members of staff perceive RI-status as an indication of capability of independent research, this could influence opportunities for collaboration and support offered towards developing independent research. Additionally, there may be lingering historical perceptions that only staff eligible for volume measure calculations can submit to REF. It is a consideration that where this coincides with those in minoritised communities this perception might be further exacerbated.
20. **Support offered to pursue independent research:** there could be implications for the support (or indeed pressure) to apply for or contribute to funding applications. Departments are more likely to support individuals they identify as having potential to secure research funding. There is evidence that unconscious biases and harmful stereotypes affect judgements of research quality and performance, and could negatively affect the support offered to women, global majority and disabled researchers and those with caring responsibilities, who may be judged as having less potential. Importantly, unconscious biases may materialise differently because of the intersections of these characteristics. Increased pressure on departments to identify independent researchers within a REF cycle, can lead to decision makers relying more heavily on unconscious biases, rather than taking the time to make considered decisions and examine their own biases.
21. The potential impact on protected characteristics depends on the profile of staff, particularly R-only staff without RI, which is analysed below (according to records on 11th February 2025).

UoA allocation

22. UoA allocation does not influence whether individual staff will contribute to the REF or where their contributions will sit. UoA allocation is not considered in any promotion criteria within the Exeter Academic Framework and does not determine access to any support or development opportunities. All staff must have a UoA allocation as part of the HESA return and it is not considered in any element of decision making around significant responsibility for research or research independence. Therefore, we find no negative impacts to staff of UoA allocation.

Distribution of protected characteristics among staff

23. The data presented below is at the institutional level. The REF team is currently working through further analysis, including main panel and UoA level.

Age

24. The institutional-level age profile for staff shows, predictably, that younger staff tend to be on R-only contracts and hence likely to be affected by any consequences of the RI-decision process (Fig. 1).

Our data shows that colleagues under 45 are overrepresented in R-Only job family and therefore any changes to the decision-making process may disproportionately impact colleagues in this group. Among R-only staff, of those currently not identified as RI, 55% are 35 years old or younger, compared to only 19% of those identified as having RI.

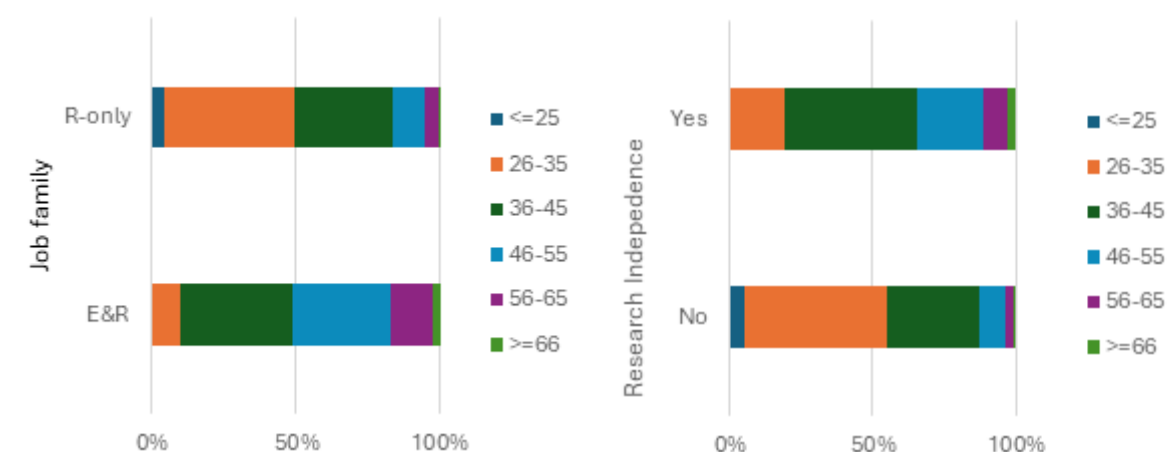


Figure 1: Age profile for staff across job families (left panel) and Research Independence status (right panel)

Disability

25. 7% of E&R staff and 10% of R-only staff declare a disability (Fig. 2). Among R-only staff, of those currently identified as RI, 6% have disclosed a disability, compared to 11% of those identified as non-RI. However, the disability status of 21% of R-only staff with RI is not known, compared to 11% of non-RI staff, suggesting that disclosure rates are lower in staff identified as having RI. By way of representation, there are no meaningful trends suggesting a disproportionate impact on disabled colleagues.

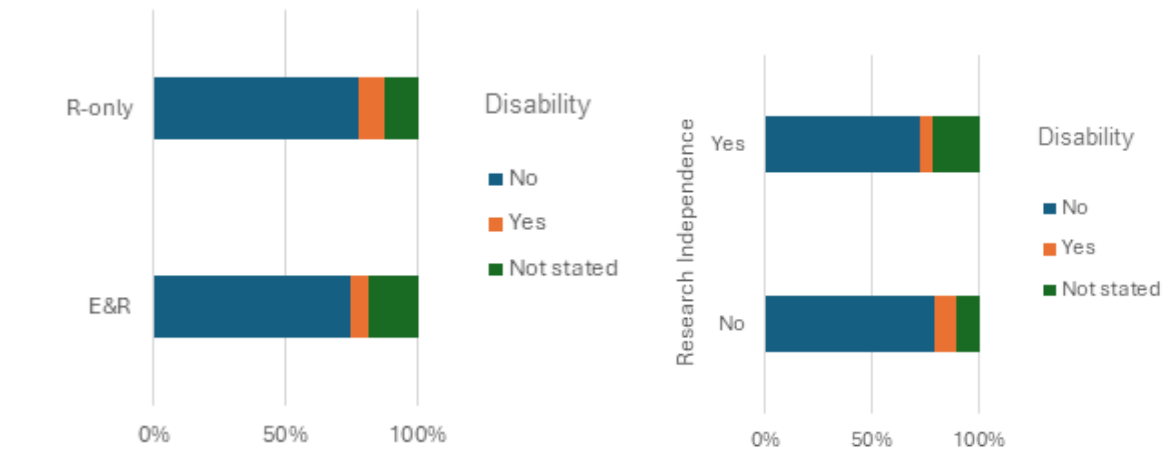


Figure 2: Distribution of disability status for staff across job families (left panel) and Research Independence status (right panel)

Ethnicity

26. Ethnic minorities represent a smaller proportion of E&R staff than of R-only staff. The largest ethnic minority group represented is Asian or Asian British, who represent 13% of E&R staff and 16% of all R-only staff. Strikingly, Asian or Asian British comprise only 6% of R-only staff with RI status. Among R-only staff, of those having RI status, a larger proportion identifies as white than of those non-RI staff (68% vs 63%). Notably, there is no ethnicity information (either reported as 'blank' or 'not stated') for 20% of R-only staff with RI, versus 11% for non-RI staff, again echoing the findings on disability that disclosure rates appear lower in staff with Research Independence. Black or Black British represent only 1% of R-only staff with RI, compared to 2% of non-RI, and 1% of all E&R staff.

Sex identifier

27. The current reporting systems only collect information on legal sex (collected under the field 'Sex ID'), with the options being female, male, other or 'prefer not to say'. At the date of writing, women comprise 54% of R-only staff, but only 39% of E&R staff. Among R-only staff with RI, 50% are female. Women comprise 55% of R-only staff without RI.
28. The data suggests that younger, disabled and ethnic minority staff are more likely to be impacted by decisions in the volume measure process, however no disproportionate impacts arise for any of these groups under the current process. The large discrepancy between the proportion of Asian or Asian British that comprise R-only staff and the proportion of those who have RI indicates that there is an opportunity to further diversify ethnic representation of R-only staff with RI at the institutional level. The differences between RI and non-RI staff in the proportion of non-disclosure of disability and ethnicity, are intriguing and would merit further investigation, as one possible explanation is that there is a perceived penalty for disclosing those characteristics.

E. Processes relating to Output Selection

29. As described in Section 5 of the Code of Practice, the University's processes for output selection will be guided by the fundamental principle of excellence, with a view to selecting a representative sample of the best work across the Units of Assessment during the assessment period, showcasing diversity across research areas, outputs and researchers. Furthermore, output selection processes will be guided by Responsible Metrics principles⁸ and, in line with REF2029 Guidance, will not be based on journal or citation metrics.

Output eligibility

30. In REF2029, there will be a complete decoupling between individual researchers eligible for the Volume Measure and the outputs selected for submission. Where previously a minimum of one and maximum of five outputs was required from staff who were eligible for REF submission, in REF2029 no such limits will be required. Furthermore, eligible outputs are not restricted to those authored by staff included in the Volume Measure. Outputs authored by staff whose contracts stipulate an expectation of research activity, as defined in Section 1.1.1 of the Code of Practice, and who meet the continuous employment criteria (0.2 FTE for at least 12 months continuous employment with the University of Exeter), may be submitted in REF2029. This expands eligible authorships beyond E&R and R-only (regardless of SRR status), including some staff in Technical Strategy & Operations, Research Software Engineers, the Library and Heritage Collections staff including Digital Humanities, IT Services and Digital.

Output selection

31. The processes below underpin the selection of outputs for REF submission at Exeter:

8

https://www.exeter.ac.uk/v8media/universityofexeter/research/researchservicesrebuild/Responsible_Metrics_Guiding_Principles_1.0.pdf

- ❖ **Nominations:** Exeter conducts an annual outputs review exercise, where staff nominate their work through the University's central research information system, Symplectic Elements. All staff on Teaching and Research and R-only contracts, plus staff in research-enabling roles across the University based in Technical Services and Operations, Research Software and Analytics and Digital Humanities (when identified as 'research active' by the Technician Commitment Working group), are allowed to nominate outputs they feel represent the highest quality of their work. Staff can indicate up to three UoAs for each output to be considered for selection.
- ❖ **Triage:** UoA leads triage outputs to determine which outputs to review each year.
- ❖ **Review:** Nominated outputs are reviewed by research staff with disciplinary and methodological expertise and given indicative scorings of quality according to REF criteria, and potentially assessed for 'fit' within the proposed UoA.
- ❖ **Moderation:** Moderation practices can vary and might include a UoA Moderation Panel, external critical friends or the final moderation being undertaken by the REF UoA lead. In some cases, DoRIs and APVCs for R&I are also included in the final moderation. A single indicative grade is given to the output. This information is restricted in access to relevant UoA leads, Faculty senior leadership and the REF project team.
- ❖ **Selection:** The selection of outputs for REF2029 will be made by a Selection Panel including the REF UoA Lead, discipline experts and senior research leaders. A likely pool of outputs will be selected in 2027, considering available EDI data, open access data and data on representativeness to assess whether the diversity of the research profile is represented. This selection will be revisited in 2028 to select the final full set of outputs. **UoAs will be asked to consider whether the set of outputs reflects the highest quality produced during the REF2029 period and whether it also represents the range of staff contributing to the UoA across the University and the breadth of research areas within the discipline(s), or, without compromising the quality profile, whether there are imbalances that could be appropriately rebalanced within the submission.**
- ❖ **Communication:** Staff will not be informed if an output they nominated has been selected for submission. Qualitative feedback and indicative grades will be shared with staff who nominated outputs via Symplectic Elements as part of Exeter's annual output review exercise.
- ❖ **Adjudication and ratifying decisions:** Where there is disagreement or a conflict of interest among UoA decision makers regarding specific output recommendations, the matter can be escalated; first to the relevant APVC-R&I(s), then to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, followed by the ADVC-RQ&I, and finally to the DVCR&I if needed.

F. Analysis of impacts identified for protected characteristics due to processes related to output selection

32. The decoupling of outputs and staff eligibility for REF Volume Measure, and the emphasis on REF submissions being a collective effort to demonstrate the quality of the discipline at the institution, rather than the quality of individual researchers, is likely to have a positive impact on protected characteristics as it widens the scope of REF outputs and places the focus on institutions, rather than individuals. However, as pointed out for 'Research Independence' in Section D, an historical perception may linger that being 'REF-able' is valuable to the institution and therefore, individuals whose outputs receive high grades in the REF and in the processes leading up to submission, may be perceived as being more valuable to departments, or as performing higher quality research. The University is mitigating the risk that such information is used to inform decisions on promotion and progression through its REF Outputs Monitoring and Review Policy on Use of Output Grades (Appendix 9 of the Code of Practice). Individuals will be able to access qualitative feedback and grades via Symplectic Elements, as detailed in Section 5 of the CoP.

33. Unconscious biases can lead to decisions which are influenced by a range of output and author characteristics. Guidance on EDI considerations in output review, including ways to tackle unconscious bias, was co-developed with UoA leads. The University will provide REF decision-makers adequate EDI training (see I. Proposed mitigating actions) and monitor the effect of output selection processes by analysing relevant data from annual output review exercises, to understand whether specific groups are underrepresented in selection pools.

Profile of staff participating in output review exercises

34. The analysis below pertains to the output review exercise for 2024/25. Data is limited to nominating authors; however, decision-making can be influenced by perceived characteristics of any existing co-authors as well.

Job family

35. Staff with contractual research responsibilities (Teaching and Research, Research only, including staff in research-enabling roles across the University based in Technical Strategy & Operations, Research Software and Analytics and Digital Humanities) were invited to nominate outputs. In the 2025 output review exercise, we observed a large discrepancy between proportion of different job families in the pool of invited staff and in nominated outputs, with only 7% of outputs nominated by Research only staff. 82% of the Research only staff who did not nominate any outputs do not have Research Independence status, suggesting that legacy perceptions about REF eligibility may have affected participation in the exercise.

Table 1. Representation of contract types in overall staff pool, invited staff and nominated outputs in the 2025 output review exercise.

	Staff (as per 11 February 2025)	Staff invited to nominate	Nominations
Research only	1143 (45%)	863 (39%)	280 (7%)
Education & Research	1386 (55%)	1367 (61%)	3670 (93%)

36. We further analysed invited staff and nominations data (i.e. pertaining only to staff who submitted outputs to the exercise) by protected characteristics (age, disability, ethnicity, gender) and job family (Research only and Teaching and Research), in two ways. First, we examined invitations and nominations of research only and teaching and research staff separately; to understand how different staff groups were represented within the two job families. Second, to understand the extent to which nominations are representative of the full range of staff that outputs can be drawn from, we looked at the proportions of each sub-group (for example, female staff on teaching and research contracts) in the overall pool of invited staff versus the pool of nominated outputs, for each main panel.

Age

37. Staff aged 36 and above are associated to a larger proportion of nominated outputs than their proportion in the pool of invited staff, for both E&R and R-only staff (Fig. 3). At main panel level (Fig. 4), we observe that underrepresentation of R-only staff occurs across all main panels, the difference between proportions in the invited and nominations pool decreasing with age. In main panels A, B and C, E&R staff aged 36 or above are overrepresented in the nominations pool relative to their proportion in the invited staff pool, with the difference decreasing for ages 66 and above. In panel D there is no obvious pattern with age and differences in proportions between invited staff and nominations are smaller than in other panels.

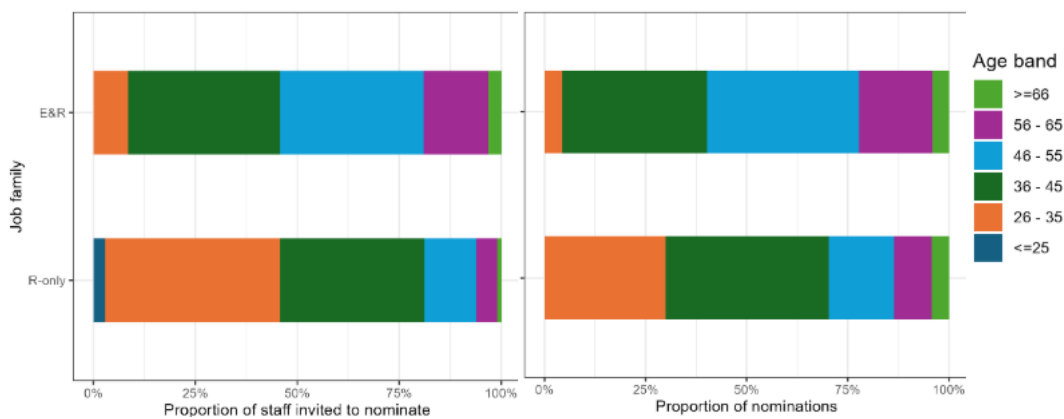


Figure 3: Age profile of invited staff (left) and staff associated to nominated outputs (right), disaggregated by job family.

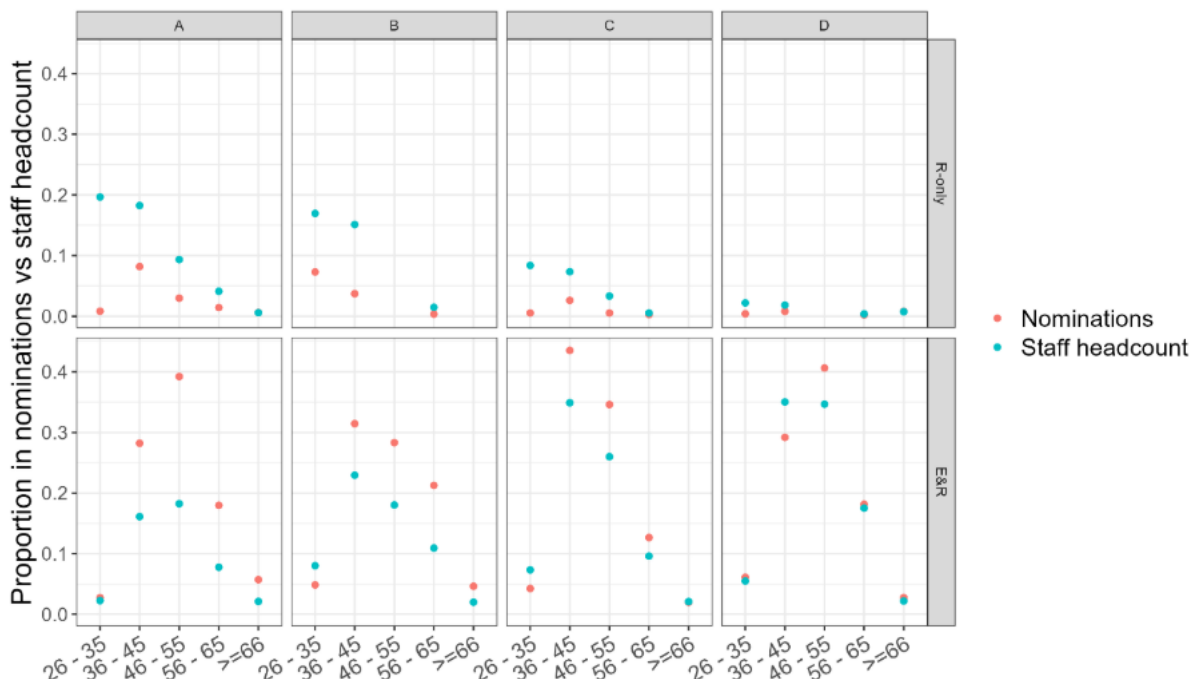


Figure 4: Proportion of staff by job family and age band present in the overall invited pool (blue) compared to the proportion of staff in each group in the overall nomination pool (red). Panels show aggregated data for UoAs belonging to main panels A-D

Disability

38. 10.7% of invited research-only staff have disclosed a disability, yet only 6% of nominations by R-only staff have been submitted by individuals who disclosed a disability (Fig. 5). This is in line with the proportion of R-only staff with Research Independence (6%, see paragraph 25), suggesting a lingering perception that only staff with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) are eligible to submit outputs to REF.

39. At main panel level, there were no nominations in main panel B by R-only staff who disclosed a disability (Fig. 6, panel B), despite 7% of R-only staff in panel B being disabled, none of whom hold

Research Independence. The proportion of outputs nominated by disabled E&R staff were similar to the proportion of this group in the overall pool of invited staff, across all panels. Across panels A, B and C, non-disabled staff and staff who chose not to declare any information represent a higher proportion of nominated outputs than their representation in the invited pool. In panel D, the proportion of nominated outputs closely resembles the proportion of each group in the invited pool.

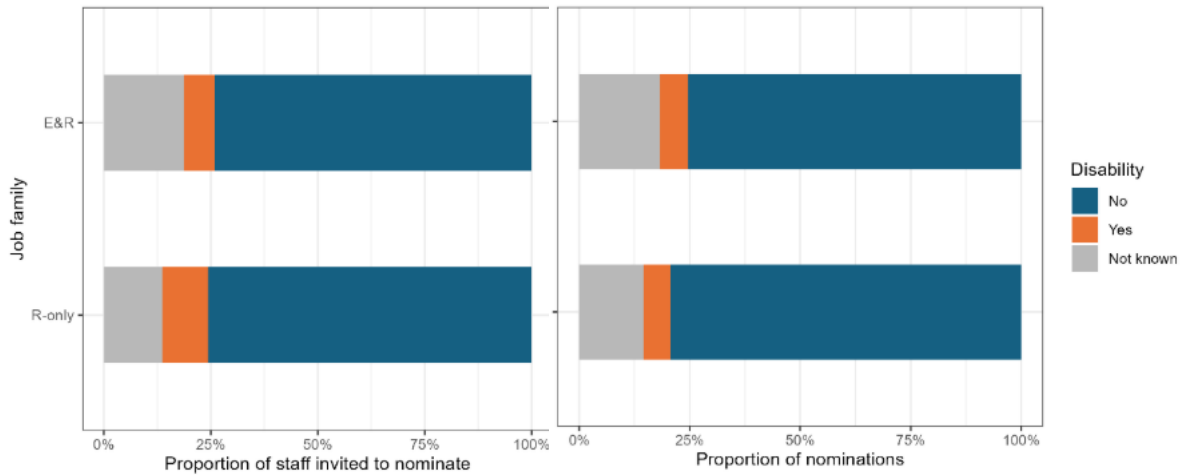


Figure 5: Disability status of invited staff (left) and staff associated to nominated outputs (right), disaggregated by job family.

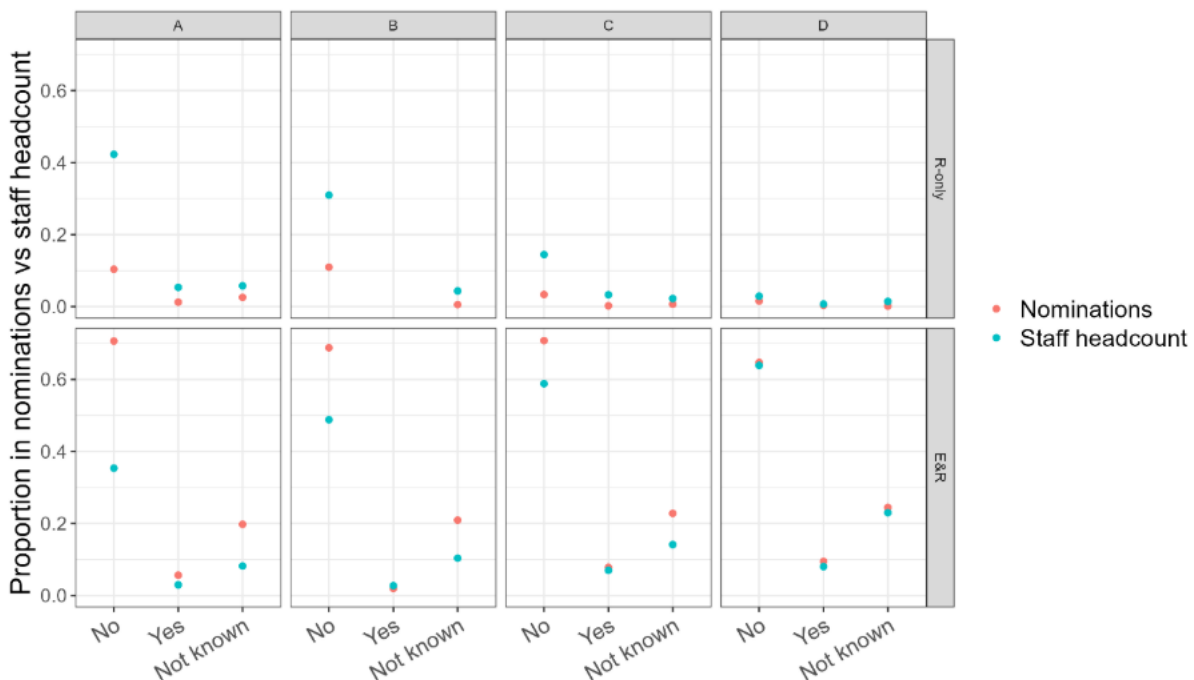


Figure 6: Proportion of staff by job family and disability status present in the overall invited pool (blue) compared to the proportion of staff in each group in the overall nomination pool (red). Panels show aggregated data for UoAs belonging to main panels A-D.

Ethnicity

40. White-identifying staff represent the majority of invited E&R staff (75%) and are comparatively associated to a larger proportion of nominations (79% of nominations by teaching and research staff) (Fig. 7). In contrast, 56% of nominations submitted by R-only staff were made by white-identifying individuals, whereas this group comprises 64% of the invited R-only staff. Asian/Asian British are associated with a larger proportion of nominations by R-only staff (34%) than the group's proportion of the R-only pool (15%). All other minoritised ethnic groups (Black or Black British, Mixed, Other Ethnic Groups) are associated with a lower proportion of nominations, than their proportion in the invited staff pool. This is true for both job families, but more evident in R-only. For example, Mixed and Other Ethnic Groups comprise 3% and 2%, respectively, of invited R-only staff but no nominations are associated with these groups.

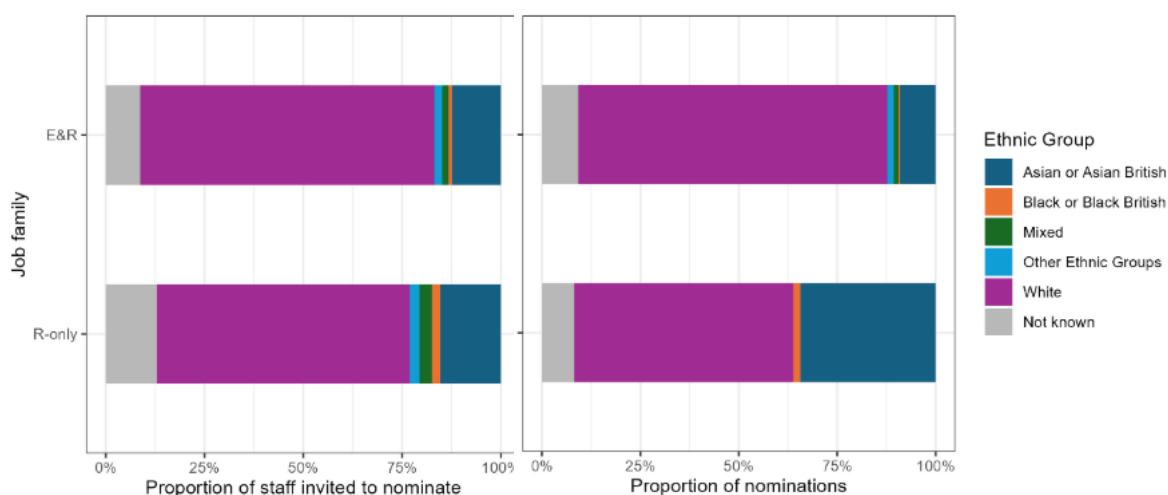


Figure 7: Ethnicity of invited staff (left) and staff associated to nominated outputs (right), disaggregated by job family.

41. At main panel level, a more complex picture emerges. Except for panel D, white-identifying E&R staff are represented in larger proportions in nominations than the group's proportion in the pool of invited staff (Fig. 8). In panel C, R-only staff identifying as Asian or Asian British, Black or Black British and Mixed ethnicity are not associated with any nominations. In panel B, E&R staff identifying as Asian or Asian British have a higher proportion of associated nominations than the proportion of this group in the invited pool. Across all panels, we also see that E&R staff for whom we have no ethnicity data, or who have indicated a preference to not disclose their ethnicity, are consistently associated with a higher proportion of nominations than their proportion in the pool of invited staff.

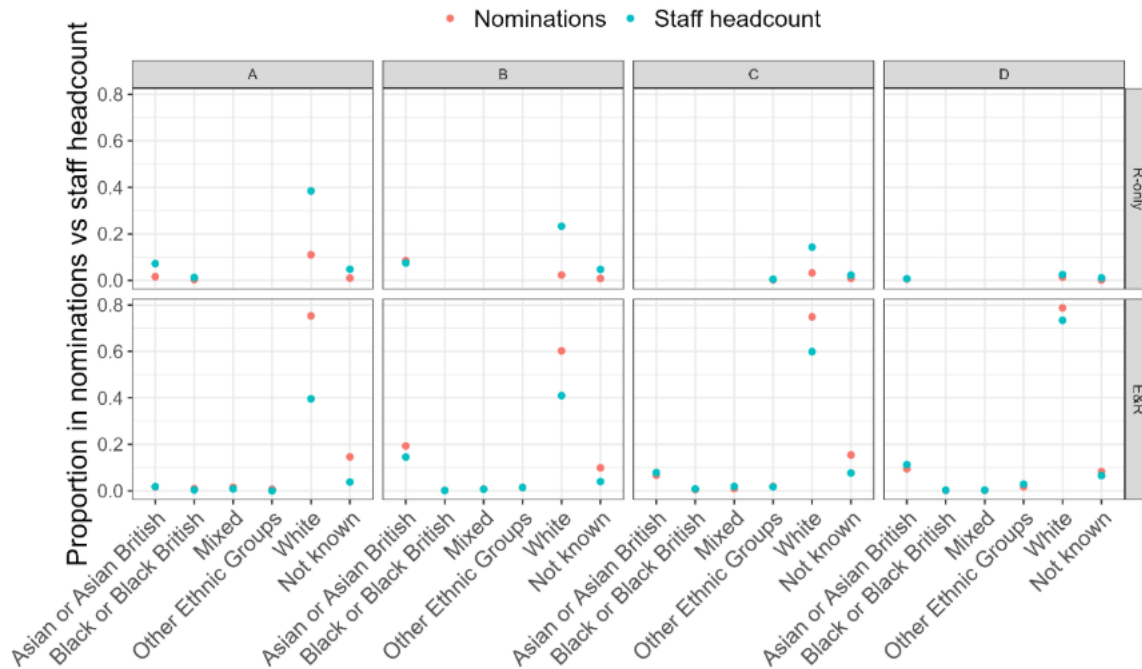


Figure 8: Proportion of staff by job family and ethnic group present in the overall invited pool (blue) compared to the proportion of staff in each group in the overall nominations pool (red) Panels show aggregated data for UoAs belonging to main panels A-D

Sex Identifier

42. At the level of the whole institution, for E&R staff, the gender distribution of invited staff is similar to the distribution of staff associated with nominated outputs. By contrast, over 60% of nominations from R-only staff are associated with male staff, even though males comprise less than 50% of invited research only staff (Fig. 9).
43. Across all main panels, both male and female R-only staff are underrepresented in nominations, relative to their proportion of the invited pool, with differences being smaller in panels C and D. In panels A and B, both female and male E&R staff represent a larger proportion of nominations than their representation in the invited pool. In panel B, this difference is largest for males. In panels C and D, representation of females in the nominations pool is similar to their representation in the invited pool, whereas the proportions of nominations associated with males is larger than the proportion of males in the invited pool.

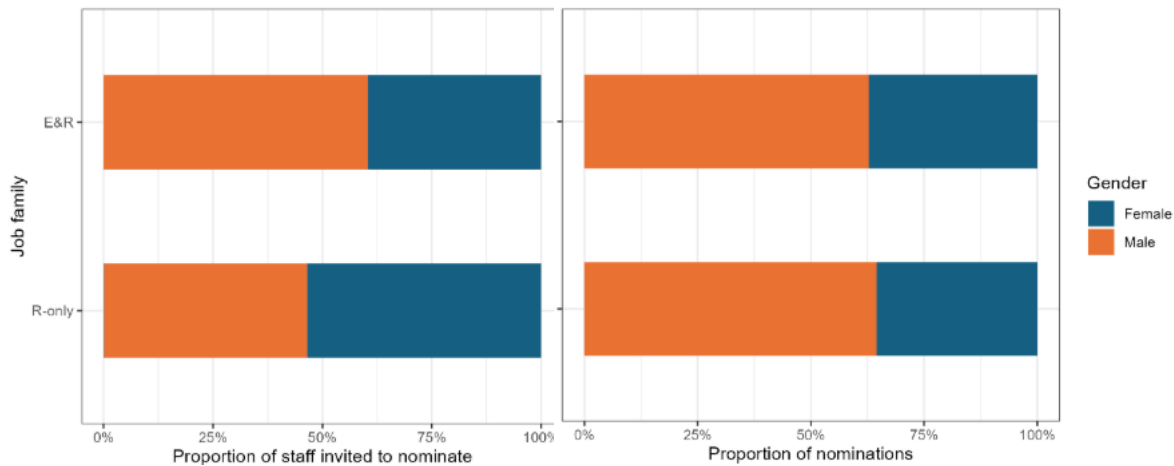


Figure 9: Sex identifier of invited staff (left) and staff associated to nominated outputs (right), disaggregated by job family.

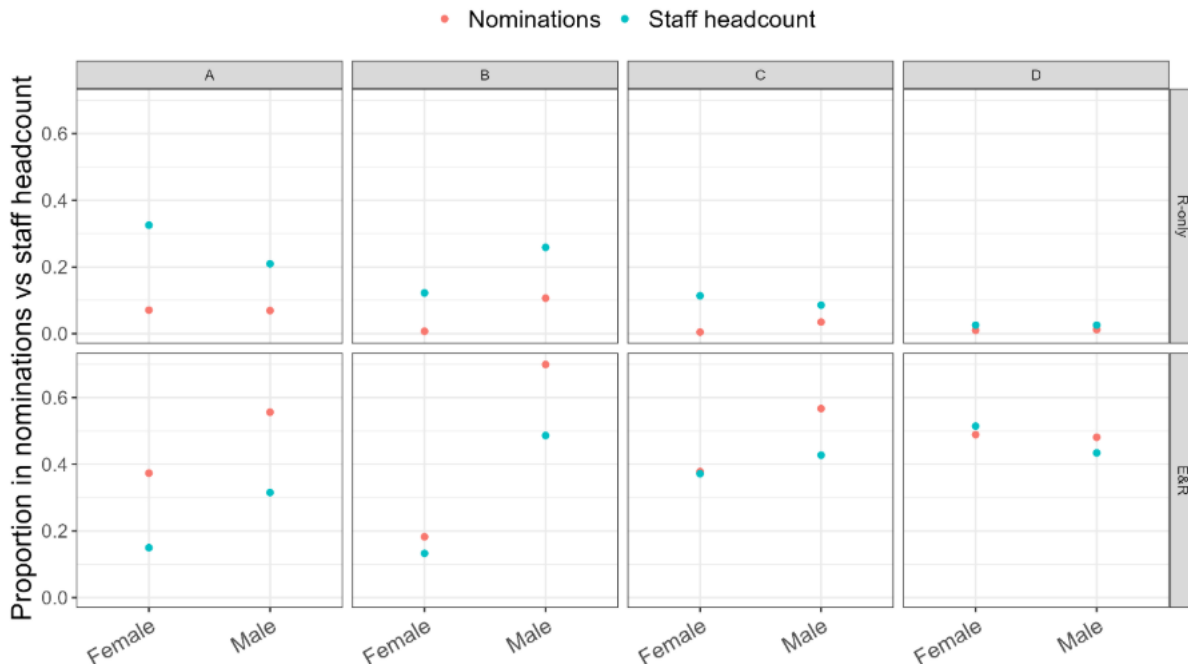


Figure 10: Proportion of staff by job family and sex identifier present in the overall invited pool (blue) compared to the proportion of staff in each group in the overall nominations pool (red) Panels show aggregated data for UoAs belonging to main panels A-D

44. Work is undergoing to analyse the distribution of output indicative grades by protected characteristics and contract type of nominating author to understand whether biases related to author characteristics are affecting estimated grades. The resulting analysis will be added to this Equality Impact Assessment, as a living document. This data will be made available to UoA leads annually following the outputs review exercise.

G. Processes relating to Impact Case Study Selection

45. The selection of Impact Case Studies (ICS) forms a central process for submission to the Engagement and Impact element of REF2029. As described in Appendix 2 of the Code of Practice, and similarly to output selection, the University's processes for ICS selection will be guided by the fundamental principle of excellence, with a view to selecting a representative sample of the best impact across the Units of Assessment during the assessment period, showcasing diversity across research areas, outputs and researchers. Furthermore, ICS selection processes will be guided by Responsible Metrics principles⁹.
46. Impact Case Study selection is underpinned by these key processes:
- Identification of potential case studies
 - Drafting of case studies
 - Impact review panels
 - Selection
 - Communication
47. **Identification of potential case studies** is informed by departmental impact pipelines which track the full range of impact-related activity within the department, including activity that may feed into a REF Impact Case Study. Departmental impact pipelines are maintained by DoRIs, with support and guidance from the Impact Evidence and Evaluation (IEE) team. DoRIs are also responsible for assigning potential UoAs to each impact activity. UoA leads, with support from the IEE team, are then able to review impact activities relevant to their UoA to identify a long list of potential case studies and authors for the current or future assessment periods.
48. UoA leads prioritise impact activities for drafting REF ICS for the current assessment period by considering the following characteristics of the activity:
- The maturity of the impact
 - The reach and significance of the impact and whether it can be evidenced
 - The link to University of Exeter research
 - The availability of evidence
49. **Drafting of case studies** begins with the identification and prioritisation of ICS for outline draft and review. This is discussed annually (from 2025) at Main Panel meetings. Potential ICS authors will be supported in the writing process (including evidence collection and impact evaluation) by the IEE team. Authors can also access training and mentorship from the Impact Community of Practice, as well as the suite of resources provided by Impact@Exeter.
50. **Impact Review Panels:** starting in Spring 2026 and annually until 2028, draft case studies will be reviewed and scored by a pool of internal reviewers with relevant disciplinary and REF expertise. Impact Review Panels will then assess drafts and aggregated scores, agree assessment outcomes and provide feedback and recommendations to the UoE REF Main Panels. Impact Review Panels are composed of senior academics with prior REF and impact experience and senior Professional Services staff with impact expertise. All panellists will be given EDI training, as per the training plan laid out in Appendix 7 of the CoP (see also **G. Mitigating actions** in this document).
51. **Selection** of the final set of ICS for submission will take place at the 2028 Main Panel meetings, taking into consideration whether case studies reflect **the strongest case studies representing impactful research in terms of reach, significance and rigour during this period, and whether the case studies broadly reflect the breadth of impact within their UoA.**

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https://www.exeter.ac.uk/v8media/universityofexeter/research/researchservicesrebuild/Responsible_Metrics_Guiding_Principles_1.0.pdf

52. **Communication:** Impact Review Panels will provide both qualitative feedback and indicative scores to the Main Panels. UoA leads have responsibility for sharing qualitative feedback to authors where it is provided. As with outputs, qualitative feedback will be shared with ICS authors.

H. Analysis of impacts identified for protected characteristics

53. REF2029 places emphasis on submissions being a collective effort to demonstrate the quality of the discipline at the institution, rather than the quality of individual researchers. However, as noted for perceptions about Research Independence (paragraphs 17-20) and output selection (paragraph 32), being selected to draft REF Impact Case Studies may still be associated with historical perceptions of individual quality and therefore have real or perceived impact on individual prestige and promotion processes. This is even more so when authors of impact case studies are allocated funding to help develop their ICS.
54. It is therefore important to ensure the pool of potential case studies is as broad as possible in terms of impact type and authors and that our processes are promoting equality of opportunities. In terms of impact type, the selection process will ensure that all impact categories (as identified in REF2021's Panel criteria and working methods, Annex A¹⁰, pending release of REF2029 guidance) are represented in Exeter's submission. Unconscious biases can lead to decisions which are influenced by a range of characteristics associated with the author. These biases can take place:
- a. At department level, when individual impact activities are added to the departmental pipeline – this is not a REF process but it affects REF decision making;
 - b. At UoA level, when UoA leads prioritise potential ICS for drafting;
 - c. During review of ICS drafts by reviewers and Impact Review Panels.
55. Despite the perceived prestige of writing ICS, potential authors may avoid putting themselves forward because of the additional workload involved. The allocation of workload for writing REF ICS is devolved to faculties and departments. The current recommendation is an average of 50 hours within the workload allocation for research activities to be agreed by authors with faculties and Heads of Department. Inequalities may arise if different authors are granted different workload allocations. The recommendation for ICS workload to sit within the workload model for research activities, thus trading off with other, ongoing research or impact duties, may also prevent coming forward those who are working part-time, who have caring responsibilities, who have chronic conditions or disabilities requiring adjustments and/or regular appointments, or who are facing other barriers in their career which prevent prioritising the write-up of ICS.

Profile of staff leading Impact Case Studies

56. To understand whether potential biases may be affecting Exeter's impact pipelines, we examined data on protected characteristics and job family of impact leads. The analysis below is provisional, as the data below represent the status of impact pipelines at the time of writing (September 2025), when decisions about selection and development of ICS for REF, including responsibility for write-up, are still to be finalised.
57. The majority of impact activities found in departmental pipelines, and consequentially the majority of those prioritised for REF write-up in 2025-26, are led by Education and Research (E&R) staff (Table 2). While there may be impact activities led by research only and teaching only staff that are missing from departmental impact pipelines, the more likely reason for this is the fact that the majority of long-term research funding, which enables consistent relationships with stakeholders and impact development, is held by teaching and research staff. Nevertheless, it would be important to

¹⁰ [ref-2019_02-panel-criteria-and-working-methods.pdf](https://2021.ref.ac.uk/media/1450/ref-2019_02-panel-criteria-and-working-methods.pdf) https://2021.ref.ac.uk/media/1450/ref-2019_02-panel-criteria-and-working-methods.pdf

understand whether there may be further opportunities for research only staff and teaching only staff to lead on impact activities, given that these can be included in promotion materials.

Table 2. Headcount of staff in different job families that are leading on impact activities present in the institutional impact pipelines.

	Departmental pipeline	UoA priority lists	Prioritised for REF write-up (25/26)
Research only	51 (6%)	48 (6%)	7 (6%)
Education and Research	678 (84%)	613 (83%)	91 (84%)
Teaching only	82 (10%)	80 (11%)	11 (10%)

58. 91% of the impact activities departmental pipelines have been passed on to UoA priority lists, hence we will restrict further analysis to impact activities present in UoA priority lists and those prioritised for write-up in 2025/26. Given the small number of research only and teaching only staff leading impact activities prioritised for write-up, to avoid identifying individuals, we report on aggregated data on protected characteristics, rather than disaggregated by job family.

Age

59. 71% of impact leads in UoA priority lists, and 75% of those selected for write-up in 25/26, are between the ages of 36 to 55. Staff younger than 36 and staff older than 66 represented a small proportion of impact leads, adding to 10% in UoA priority lists, and only 6% in activities selected for write-up. These proportions are lower than for the wider E&R population (approximately 13% are younger than 36 and older than 66).

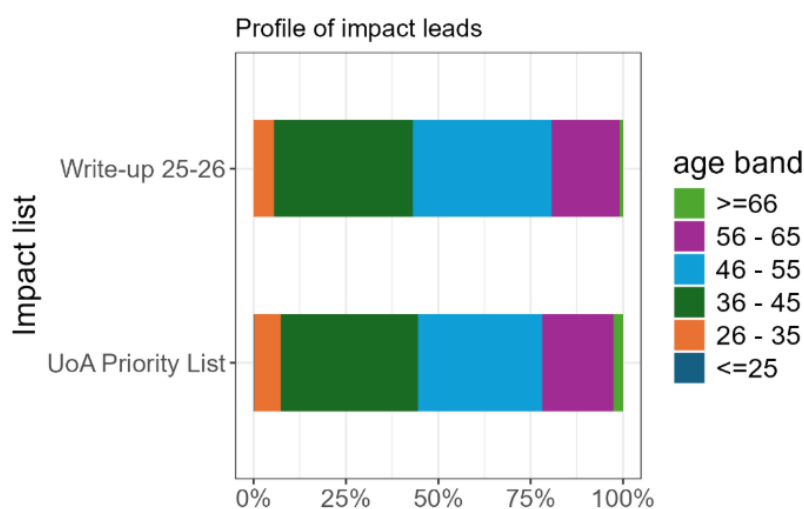


Figure 11: Age profile of staff leading impact activities selected for UoA prioritisation and write-up in 25/26

Disability

60. In line with institutional figures for disability in research staff (see paragraph 25), 7% of impact leads in UoA priority lists have declared a disability, rising to 8% in those selected for write-up in 25/26. We therefore find no evidence of inequality for disabled staff in terms of opportunity to lead impact case studies. The proportion of staff for whom disability status is not known is 18% in UoA priority lists and 20% in write-up lists, which is in the same order of magnitude as wider institutional data.

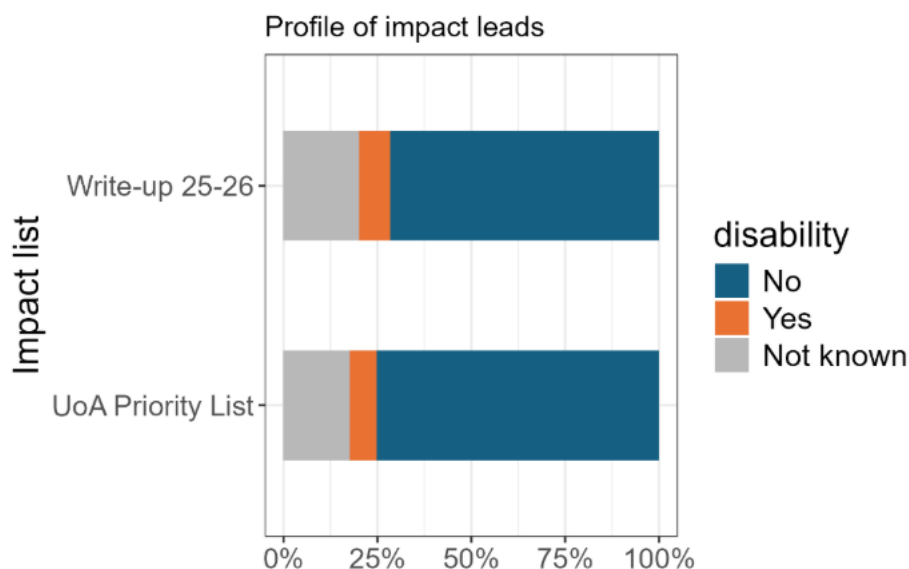


Figure 12: Disability status of staff leading impact activities selected for UoA prioritisation and write-up in 25/26

Ethnicity

61. Staff identifying as white comprise 82% of impact leads in UoA priority lists and 88% in activities selected for write-up in 25/26. These proportions are higher than the proportion of white-identifying staff in the wider E&R population (74%). The largest ethnic minoritised group, Asian or Asian British staff, represent approximately 12.5% of Exeter's E&R staff, but only 6% of current impact leads. Staff identifying as Black or Black British and Mixed represent respectively 1% and 2% of impact leads in UoA priority lists and are similarly represented in the case studies selected for write-up. Staff identifying as other ethnic groups represent 1% of impact leads in UoA priority lists, but none have been selected for write-up at this time. It may therefore be necessary to examine REF and, particularly, departmental processes, in terms of promoting equality of opportunity for all ethnic groups to lead impact case studies.

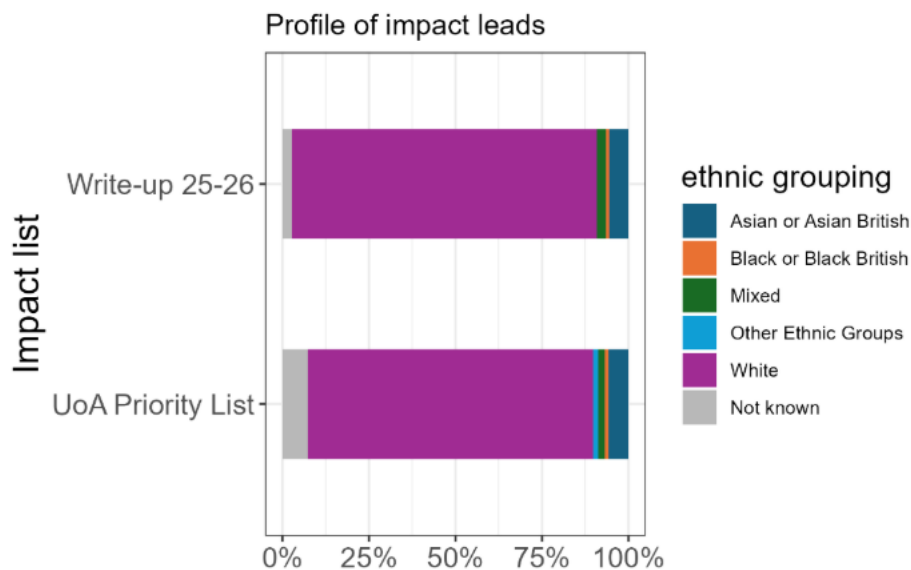


Figure 13: Ethnic grouping of staff leading impact activities selected for UoA prioritisation and write-up in 25/26

Sex Identifier

62. Male identifying staff represent 60% of impact leads in UoA priority lists and 58% in cases selected for write-up. Female staff represents 40% and 42% respectively in UoA priority lists and write-up lists. This is largely in line with the profile of Teaching and research staff at the University of Exeter. Hence, we find no evidence of inequalities due to sex in terms of opportunity to lead an impact case study.

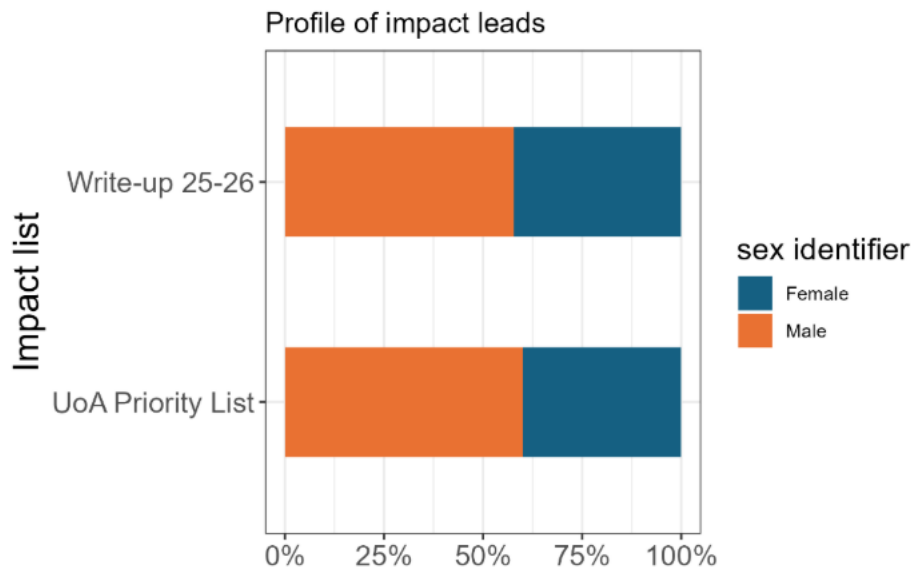


Figure 14: Sex identifier of staff leading impact activities selected for UoA prioritisation and write-up in 25/26

I. Proposed mitigating actions

Volume measure processes

63. Ensuring decisions on RI-status are made, where possible, on the basis of relevant contracts/job descriptions to ensure a standardised approach.
64. The responsibility of indicating staff as having RI will be kept within a small group of people who are closest to the individuals, to ensure consistency in decisions and awareness of the extent to which the individuals meet the indicators.
65. Information on individual RI status should be kept confidential to avoid influence on promotion/recruitment decisions and departmental support. Affected staff may request that this information is shared with them, for example for inclusion in promotion documents or job applications for other institutions. However, where decisions are made on the basis of contractual obligations, then RI status does not (and should not) reflect individual achievements, which would underpin arguments for promotion documents/job applications; where decisions are made because individuals secured independent funding, that achievement, rather than RI status, should be used in promotion documents.
66. Ensuring that communications on identification of RI-status mitigate perceptions as referenced in paragraph 17, by emphasising the decoupling of volume measure and outputs in REF2029.
67. Ensuring adequate EDI briefing and training on unconscious bias for those responsible for indicating staff as having RI (see Code of Practice Appendix 7 for a training plan).
68. Ensuring HoDs and Faculty Business Partners have enough time to make considered, careful decisions.
69. Information on make-up of protected characteristics in R-only staff with RI vs non-RI is made available to decision-makers at regular intervals. For this purpose, we have set up a REF2029 EDI Dashboard for decision makers to consult. To improve the quality of data at UoA level, and to comply with REF requirements, it will be important to reinforce messaging to Departments on systematically assigning R-only staff to UoAs.
70. Within departments, colleagues will continue to be actively encouraged to seize opportunities to conduct research independently. Departments will continue to reinforce messaging that when E&R lectureship opportunities arise, applications from a wide range of candidates are welcome.

Output selection processes

Participation in the output review exercise

71. Work is required to understand the low levels of engagement from research only and Technical Staff with the output review exercise. Potential reasons for this are:
 - legacy perceptions from REF2021, where only staff with Significant Responsibility for Research was eligible to submit outputs to REF;
 - communications regarding participation in the exercise were not clear enough or did not encourage participation from a wider range of staff. These communications include official communications from the REF team and UoA leads, as well as information communications from DoRIs, HoDs and line managers of Research only and Technical staff;
 - the exercise involved submitting outputs via Symplectic, a system that can be unintuitive for users unfamiliar with it. This presents a potential barrier for staff who have not previously used Symplectic or participated in a REF submission.
72. We have launched a survey to all staff invited to nominate outputs in 2024-25 to understand key barriers to participation and develop a brief action plan to reduce those barriers. Results of the survey, the action plan and steps to monitor outcomes will be added to this document.

Moderation, selection, and ratification of decisions

73. To mitigate the risk that unconscious biases related to author or output characteristics influence decisions on final indicative grades and selection of outputs for submission, REF2029 decision-makers at the University will be required to undertake bespoke Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training, taking place in the first half of the academic year 2026/27. The training will include how to use EDI data to ensure inclusive decision-making.
74. Additionally, UoA leads will be asked to draft guiding principles for the selection process, which will include guidance on EDI considerations and will be shared with selection panels.
75. For the purpose of monitoring bias in output selection processes, the following data will be made available to decision-makers at key points where the output selection pool will be shaped:
- Selection panels – 2027:
 - o Distribution of outputs selected for review by gender, ethnicity, disability, age group and job family of nominating author;
 - o Distribution of indicative grades of outputs by gender, ethnicity, disability, age group and job family of nominating author;
 - o Distribution of likely outputs for submission by gender, ethnicity, disability, age group and contract type of nominating author;
 - REF Main Panels – 2027:
 - o Distribution of likely outputs for submission by gender, ethnicity, disability, age group and contract type of nominating author;
 - Selection panels and REF Main Panels – 2028:
 - o Distribution of final selection of outputs for submission by gender, ethnicity, disability, age group and contract type of nominating author;

Communication

76. Nominating authors will have access to output grades and qualitative feedback on reviewed outputs. To mitigate the risk of historical associations of individual researcher quality with REF outcomes, communications of grades and qualitative feedback are an opportunity to:
- reiterate that REF processes are not intended to assess individuals;
 - clarify institutional policy on use of output reviews and grades (i.e. who has access to the information and for what purpose);
 - reiterate that output grades will not be used for promotion or progression decisions.
77. **A potential barrier to breaking historical links (or perceptions of such a link) between REF preparations and promotion decisions at the University of Exeter is the use of REF quality descriptors in Exeter Academic promotion criteria** for Education & Research and Research-only job families. One of the sub-categories in which staff are assessed, ‘Research excellence’, requires demonstrating production of “outputs recognised as being internationally excellent or world leading with a consideration of originality, rigour and significance”, which mirrors REF2021 assessment criteria and quality levels descriptors¹¹. While these criteria are interpreted in the broader context of a combination of achievements and a balanced scorecard approach is used to evaluate promotion applications, the language used may still lead to conflation of REF processes and promotion decisions.
78. **Summary of proposed mitigations relating to output selection processes**
- ❖ Survey and action plan to understand and mitigate barriers to participation of Research only and Technical Staff in the output review exercise;

¹¹ <https://2021.ref.ac.uk/guidance-on-results/guidance-on-ref-2021-results/index.html#qualityRatings>

- ❖ Bespoke Inclusive and Responsible Research Assessment training for REF decision-makers at the University, planned for the first half of 2026/27;
- ❖ EDI data will be made available to decision-makers, planned for 2027 and 2028;
- ❖ Communications to decision-makers and nominating authors to reiterate that REF processes are not intended to assess individuals and that output grades will not be used for promotion or pay progression decisions. Our policy on sharing grades and their intended use is attached, Appendix 9 of the Code of Practice and will be disseminated to all staff;
- ❖ In coordination with the Responsible Research Assessment Group, discuss with the Exeter Academic steering group how to ensure that Exeter Academic criteria are not conflated with output review outcomes.

Impact Case Study selection processes

Inclusion in departmental impact pipelines

79. Departmental impact pipelines are not a REF process, but part of the institutional impact strategy. The development of the REF Code of Practice and present Equality Impact Assessment has nevertheless emphasised a need for further transparency in the assembly of impact pipelines and to potentially identify further ways to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people of different backgrounds, as per the Public Sector Equality Duty. Our data suggests that particular attention may be required to increase opportunities to lead or develop impact activities for staff from ethnic minoritised backgrounds and staff in younger and older age groups.

Selection for drafting and submission

80. Recommend to RIEC the development and implementation of an institutional policy on workload allocation for drafting a REF Impact Case Study.
81. REF2029 decision-makers at the University, including UoA leads, Impact Review Panel members and Output Selection Panels, will be required to undertake bespoke Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training, taking place in the first half of the academic year 2026/27. The training will include how to use EDI data to ensure inclusive decision-making. Because the first Impact Review Panels will convene before EDI training can be delivered, the REF team will ensure all panel members have completed the mandatory institutional training on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Panel members will also receive the guidance provided to UoA leads on EDI considerations for output review, which includes advice on how to reduce unconscious bias in research assessment.
82. To monitor potential biases in ICS selection, the following data will be made available to decision-makers at key points where the ICS selection pool will be shaped:
- UoA leads and Impact Review Panels – 2026, 2027, 2028:
 - Distribution of ICS selected for review by gender, ethnicity, disability, age group and job family of ICS author;
 - Distribution of indicative grades of ICS by gender, ethnicity, disability, age group and job family of ICS author;
 - REF Main Panels – 2028:
 - Distribution of ICS selected for review by gender, ethnicity, disability, age group and job family of ICS author;

Communication

83. ICS authors will have access to qualitative feedback on reviewed drafts. As with outputs, to mitigate the risk of historical associations of individual researcher quality with REF outcomes, communications of qualitative feedback are an opportunity to:

- reiterate that REF processes are not intended to assess individuals;
- clarify use of indicative grades (i.e. who has access to the information and for what purpose);
- reiterate that indicative REF grades are not used for promotion or progression decisions.

J. Colleague wellbeing impacts arising from the changes

84. The necessary process of determining Research Independence represents additional workload for HoDs, Department Managers and Faculty Business Partners.

85. Potential impacts on wellbeing include historical perceptions of being “REF-able” and perceived consequences for career progression. The financial issues being experienced by the sector, leading to two rounds of voluntary severance schemes at Exeter, may exacerbate these concerns. Additionally, the language in the Exeter Academic promotion guidance uses similar terminology to define research quality as is used to define research excellence in the context of REF, potentially perpetuating the historical perception of a link between individuals and the institution’s REF performance. To mitigate this, as mentioned in paragraph 32, communications will clearly emphasise the decoupling of volume measure and outputs. Additionally, discussions with HR colleagues leading on Exeter Academic will be required to explore scope for changing the language used in Exeter Academic promotion criteria (paragraph 58).

K. Impact on staff and students connected to the Armed Forces Covenant

The University of Exeter has pledged its support to the Armed Forces Covenant and recognises the value that the Armed Forces community brings to the University. Further advice can be sought by emailing armedforcescovenant@exeter.ac.uk where specific queries may be addressed.

86. The processes described in this document do not impact staff and students connected to the Armed Forces Covenant.

Appendix 2: Selection of Impact Case Studies

The approach to selecting impact case studies for REF2029 has focused on the following steps:

- Identification of potential case studies
- Drafting of case studies
- Impact review panels
- Selection
- Communication

4.1 Identification of potential case studies

The role of the department

Directors of Research and Impact (DoRIs) are responsible for developing and fostering a thriving, sustainable and vibrant culture of research impact and engagement within their respective departments, along with the departmental Directors of Business, Engagement and Innovation (DoBEI).

DoRIs maintain an impact pipeline for the department that logs and monitors all potential impact-related outcomes or activities, over the long-term; the pipeline is reviewed as part of the department's annual review process. The impact pipelines are designed to capture the full range of impact-related activity within the department and not just activities and projects that may contribute towards a REF Impact case study.

DoRIs are best placed to understand the departmental context and take the decision on what projects or other impactful activity are suitable for inclusion on the pipeline. Guidance on what may constitute relevant activity are provided along with resources from the Impact Evidence and Evaluation team, decisions are made in discussion with DoBEIs and relevant REF UoA Leads, where appropriate.

To support with pipeline development and broader research impact & engagement culture, activities, as well as development of potential case studies, each department is assisted by a named Impact, Evidence and Evaluation Officer (IEEO), within the Research Services Division. Research partnerships and knowledge exchange and engagement activities are additionally supported by theme leads from Exeter Innovation (EI).

DoRIs are asked to assign one or more potential UoAs to each impact activity within the pipeline; these then build a set of UoA-level impact pipelines. REF UoA Leads, in collaboration with relevant DoRIs, are then able to review the UoA-level impact pipeline to identify potential projects and case study authors, either for REF2029 or future REF exercises.

Identified individuals linked to potential impact case studies (see below) are supported within the department and encouraged to collect and collate evidence of outcomes and impact of their research, with training and guidance from the named IEEO.

For impactful activities led by staff outside the faculty structure, that have the potential to be developed into a REF case study, the central REF team will identify aligned departments and UoAs to ensure adequate and appropriate support can be provided.

Impact pipelines

The department-level impact pipeline is a Sharepoint list of impact activities, projects or outcomes. The lists are configured to collect relevant metadata for each item in the list and to feed this data through to relevant UoA-level Sharepoint lists, once a UoA is assigned.

Metadata for each item on the Sharepoint list describes:

- Who the key stakeholders and key support contacts are
- Potential UoAs the activity could be aligned to
- Whether the activity is linked to a previously submitted case study
- When the key impacts are likely to materialise by and the current level of maturity of the impact.
- Which REF cycle it could be most appropriate for.

REF UoA Leads are then able to further prioritise activities in the UoA-level impact pipeline as having potential for development into an impact case study for either the current or future REF cycles.

REF UoA Leads are asked to consider the following, when prioritising which items in the list should be prioritised for drafting:

- The maturity of the impact
- The reach and significance of the impact and whether it can be demonstrated
- The link to University of Exeter research
- The availability of evidence

Guidance and templates to support prioritisation are provided by the REF team, along with resources provided by Impact Evidence and Evaluation team. REF UoA Leads will be supported by the relevant IEEO in making decisions on prioritisation and will discuss at the UoE REF Main Panel meetings annually when prioritisation takes place.

4.2 Drafting of case studies

Each REF UoA Lead has identified a long-list of potential impact case studies (ICS) from the UoA level pipeline. From this list, they will be asked to work with ICS authors and relevant DoRIs to prepare draft ICS. The number of ICS to be developed will initially be based on the required number for their UoA (as determined by the volume measure) plus *at least* one further draft impact case study to provide additional resilience to the impact preparations, without compromising quality and capacity to support ICS development. This number may increase depending on recommendations from the impact review panels (see below).

The drafting and review process for potential impact case studies will start in the academic year 2025/26, and continue along the timeline below, with the caveat that additional review phases may be added as needed:

- July 2025 (UoE REF Main Panel meetings): Identification of long-list and prioritisation of ICS for outline draft and review (no more than 50% of expected ICS to be submitted)
- Winter 2025/2026: Deadline for draft submission
- Spring 2026: Impact Case Study review panel (see below)
- July 2026 (UoE REF Main Panel meetings): Prioritisation of remaining ICS for outline draft and discuss the number of ICS to be submitted + one extra.
- Winter 2026/ 2027: Deadline for draft submission
- Spring 2027: Impact Case Study review panel (see below)
- July 2027 (UoE REF Main Panel meetings): Identification of any additional ICS to be written up if any current ICS unviable and further drafts to be prepared
- Winter 2027/ 2028: Deadline for draft submission
- Spring 2028: Impact Case Study review panel (see below)
- July 2028 (UoE REF Main Panel meeting): Decision on whether further review is required, confirmation of final selection of ICS
- September/October 2028: Pre-submission UoE REF Main panel meetings

Additional support for ICS authors

Each Autumn from 2025 to 2027, potential ICS authors will be invited to meet with their IEEO to discuss the author's impact planning. They will also be invited to attend bespoke workshops, delivered by the IEEO team, which will cover writing impact case studies, evidence collection and impact evaluation.

Authors will have access to the Impact Community of Practice (as do all staff), which offers training and peer-mentorship to staff involved in impactful research ([Impact Community of Practice - Home](#)) as well as the suite of resources provided by [Impact@Exeter](#), such as the Impact Resources Library ([Impact Resources Library](#)), containing templates, guidance and training on impact, evaluation and evidence.

Where appropriate, case study authors can apply for additional support from an in-house pool of project delivery experts, who can support with activities such as:

- Building Logic Models and developing Theories of Change
- Stakeholder mapping
- Impact evidence collection

- Procurement of external support for impact evaluation
- Planning and delivery of impact and engagement activities

Applications will need to be discussed and supported by the relevant REF UoA Leads.

4.3 The Impact Review Panel

The review process for impact case studies will start in 2025/26 academic year. The review process will involve:

- a review and scoring of case studies by a pool of internal reviewers with experience of REF,
- an aggregation of scoring from the review exercise,
- an Impact Case Study Review Panel who will be provided with the drafts and aggregated scores ahead of review meetings in April/May 2026.

The REF project team will recruit a pool of internal and external reviewers (with external review taking place in the academic year 2027/28). Each ICS will be peer-reviewed by 2-3 internal reviewers within the relevant academic field, including the appointed UoA Leads, using an internal scoring system. External review will be used for calibration purposes.

Reviews will take place biannually of each year. Review scores for each ICS will be aggregated and presented along with reviewer comments at the biannual Impact Case Study Review Panels, which will be organised along Main Panels A, B, C & D; these will take place twice a year leading up to the submission. Additional review phases may be added to each academic year, as needed.

The panel will assess individual case studies collective scores provided by the reviewers and agree the assessment outcomes, providing panel feedback and recommendations to the REF team for discussion with the Impact Case Study authors and UoA leads. Outcomes will be discussed at the UoE REF Main Panel meetings in July.

In 2027, the Impact Case Study Review Panel will also comment on whether any further sector-based or discipline-based views might be warranted, potentially provided by individuals external to the university. The panel will also note if a further review of the case study is required.

Should further review be required in 2028, the Impact Case Study Review Panel will reconvene for all UoAs, or selected UoAs, as necessary in Autumn 2028, prior to the submission deadline.

Each Impact Case Study Review panel will be chaired by a senior academic with prior REF panellist or assessor experience and will include other senior academics with relevant REF and impact experience. Each panel will also be supported by a Professional Services advisory panel, composed of the Assistant Director for Sector and Corporate Partnerships, Exeter Innovation (EI), a member of EI with a relevant Faculty facing role, the Impact Evidence and Evaluation Manager and relevant Faculty IEEO. All panellists will be given EDI training, as per the training plan laid out in Appendix 7.

4.4 Selection

The Impact Case Study Review panel recommendations will inform discussion at the 2027/28 UoE REF Main Panel meetings, to decide which selection of draft case studies are likely to be submitted, and which might continue to be prepared as back-up/alternative case studies.

Final decisions on the selection of case studies will be taken at the 2028 UoE REF Main Panel meetings. These will be based on the following considerations:

- **Are the case studies reflective of the strongest case studies representing impactful research in terms of reach, significance and rigour during this period?**
- **Without damaging the quality profile and where there are case studies of similar standing, do the case studies broadly reflect the breadth of research or the types of impact within their UoA**

4.5 Communication

The Impact Case Study Review Panels provide will provide both qualitative feedback and an indicative score using the REF criteria to the UoE REF Main Panels. This will provide information on both the level of readiness at the time of review and the likely score at the point of submission based on the remaining activity or evidence collection which needs to be done.

Appendix 3: Governance, roles and responsibilities for decision-making

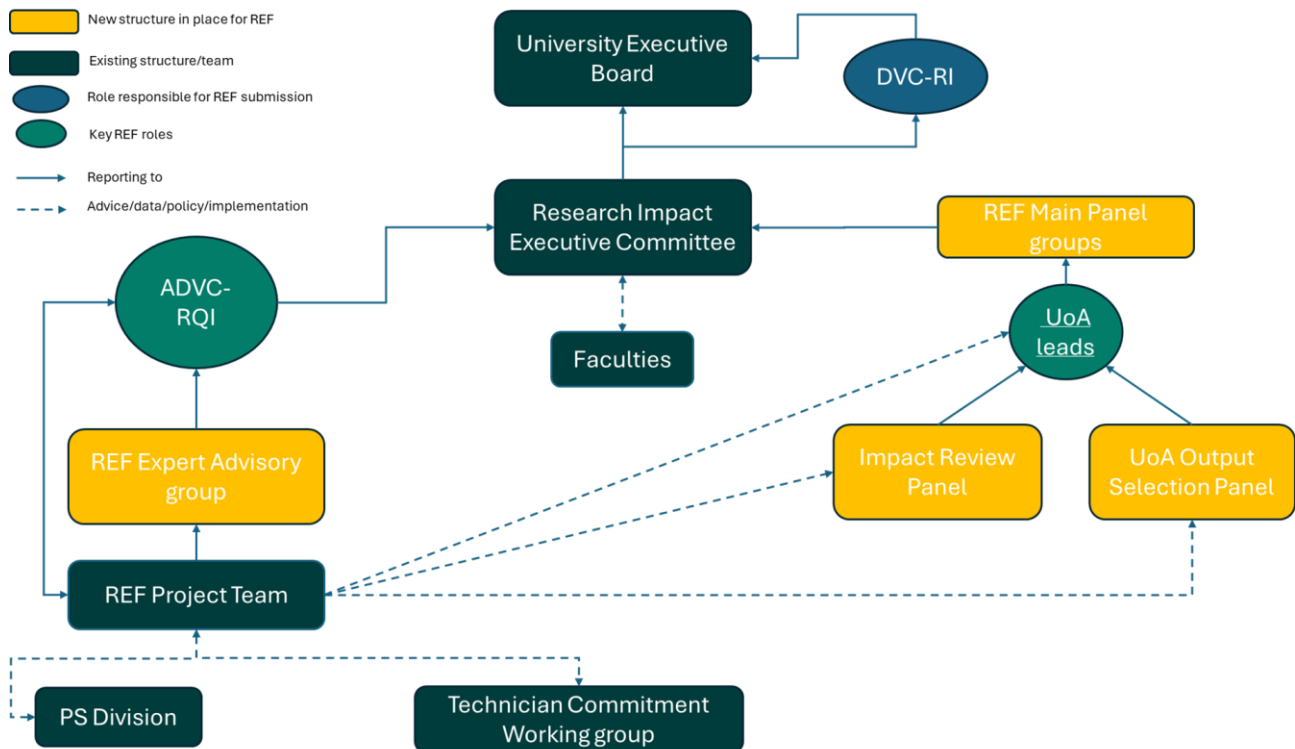


Figure 15: Governance structure and flow of information for REF 2029.

University Executive Board (UEB)

Purpose

The University Executive Board (UEB) is the senior executive management body of the University, chaired by the President and Vice-Chancellor. Its purpose is to support and advise the President and Vice-Chancellor in the performance of their duties as the University's Chief Executive Officer, within the delegation framework of the University. It is responsible for developing and delivering the University Strategy (and its sub-strategies) for the effective management of the University, including agreeing core University policies. It is chaired by the President and Vice-Chancellor and meets fortnightly during term time.

UEB's role in relation to REF2029

To have strategic oversight of the university's submission to the Research Excellence Framework. The UEB has final approval of:

- The University's REF strategy
- The University of Exeter REF2029 Code of Practice
- REF2029 final submission

Undertaking the role:

UEB will:

- Receive final drafts of all formal consultation responses made to Research England regarding REF2029 for sign-off.
- Sign off on the University's Code of Practice.
- Receive periodic updates from the DVC R&I and/or ADV-C-R&I on progress. This will include raising awareness of potential risks.
- Take the final decision on the Units of Assessment to be submitted and what, if any, multiple submissions are made to specific Units of Assessment.

Membership of UEB

- President and Vice-Chancellor
- Senior Vice-President and Provost
- Senior Vice-President and Registrar and Secretary
- Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Business Engagement and Innovation)
- Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Cornwall)
- Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience)
- Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement)
- Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (People and Culture)
- Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Impact)
- Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean (Faculty of Environment, Science and Economy)
- Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean (Faculty of Health and Life Sciences)
- Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean (Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences)
- Deputy Registrar and Executive Divisional Director of Education and Academic Services
- Chief Financial Officer and Executive Divisional Director of Finance, Infrastructure and Commercial Services
- Executive Divisional Director of External Engagement and Global
- Executive Divisional Director of Human Resources

Research and Impact Executive Committee (RIEC)

Purpose

The Research and Impact Executive Committee (RIEC) supports and advises the DVC R&I on the management and strategic direction of the University in relation to research, impact and innovation. It is chaired by the DVC R&I and meets monthly.

RIEC's role in relation to REF2029

To support the DVC R&I to have strategic oversight of the University's submission to REF2029, to shape the development of the University's REF Strategy and oversee its implementation.

The group will:

- Recommend to UEB the overall REF strategy for the University, including advising which Units of Assessment will be submitted.
- Manage the full cycle process of the institutional return to REF2029 incorporating the annual research monitoring exercise to support these preparations.

Undertaking the role:

RIEC is responsible for ensuring effective performance monitoring and management of research and impact. Specifically:

- developing and delivering the Research and Impact Strategy, one of the sovereign strategies in support of delivering Exeter's institutional strategy, Strategy 2030.
- interfacing with relevant other executive committees to ensure coordination across the university's other sovereign and enabling strategies, including, for example, the Strategy, Investment Committee (SIC); the Global Engagement Committee; the Business Engagement and Innovation Committee; and the Wellbeing, Inclusion and Culture Committee.
- Identifying items requiring consideration by the University Executive Board, Council and Senate for research and impact. The Committee reports into, and is governed through, the University Executive Board (UEB)

In addition to responsibilities within the RIEC Terms of Reference regarding performance and in relation to developing and delivering Exeter's Research and Impact Strategy, including:

- Endorse REF2029 UoE Main Panel recommendations relating to each UoAs submission strategy
- Make recommendations to UEB on all formal consultation responses made regarding REF2029
- Provide significant input into the University's Code of Practice
- Review the delivery plan for REF2029
- Receive regular updates from the ADVC-RQ&I on the progress of Exeter's preparations in relation to the delivery plan, this includes periodically reviewing potential risks and concerns
- To request information that will identify strengths and weaknesses in the REF submission and, having identified any weaknesses, suggest actions to improve the submission.
- Provide advice and recommendations on the shape of the overall submission and specific UoA submissions as requested by DVC R&I to optimise the institutional submission.
- Approve the convening of ad-hoc Review Panels (either internal or external) to support the development of specific aspects of the submission.
- To oversee and approve arrangements relating to specific policy issues (e.g. cross-referral, double-weighting etc.).

Membership of RIEC

- Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Impact) (Chair)
- Divisional Director of Research
- Dean of Postgraduate Research and of the Doctoral College
- Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Impact) – Faculty of Environment, Science and Economy
- Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Impact) – Faculty of Health and Life Sciences
- Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Impact) – Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
- Representative with responsibility for research* - Faculty of Environment, Science and Economy
- Representative with responsibility for research* - Faculty of Health and Life Sciences
- Representative with responsibility for research* - Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
- Director of Innovation

The University of Exeter REF2029 Code of Practice

- Deputy Registrar
- University Librarian
- Director of Technical Strategy and Operations

*Each faculty will nominate a DoRI to be a member of RIEC for a one-year period.

Co-opted members (in attendance)

- Additional Faculty or Professional Services representatives may be co-opted on a specific basis, for example, as related to REF or research ethics.

Directors of Postgraduate Students (DoPGRs)

- Faculty DoPGRs will be invited to attend meetings with a focus on PGR business, which will be scheduled termly.

Early Career Researcher (ECR) and Postgraduate Representation

- ECR representatives from Exeter and Cornwall, and Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) representatives from the Students Guild and the Students Union/FXU, will attend termly meetings at which Doctoral College business relevant to ECR and PGR.

REF2029 UoE Main Panel Groups (A, B, C & D)

Purpose

The UoE Main Panels are configured in line with the four REF Main Panels and convene annually to consider individual UoA quality profiles, selection processes and to provide an opportunity to discuss common challenges and share best practice. Discussions focus on updates from UoA leads on local REF preparations including an overview of research outputs, impact pipeline and SPRE considerations; institutional updates on guidance; support from REF project team; and any strategic developments.

The REF2029 UoE Main Panel Groups Terms of Reference

- To make recommendations to RIEC on decisions relating to each UoA's final submission
- To ratify Output selection and feedback from the UoA Output selection panel
- To ratify Impact selection and feedback from the Impact Review Panel
- To ratify Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE) statements
- To provide assurance that UoA level decisions have been made in accordance with Exeter's Code of Practice
- To identify strengths and weaknesses within the UoA and suggest actions to improve the submission.

REF2029 UoE Main Panel Groups Membership

- Assistant Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research Quality and Impact) (ADVC-RQ&I) (Chair)
- Divisional Director of Research
- Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Impact) for the relevant Faculty
- Relevant Faculty Business Partner
- UoA Leads
- Associate Director of Research Performance, Culture and Doctoral College

- Head of Performance and REF

REF2029 Expert Advisory Group

Purpose

To provide advice to the ADVC RQ&I and the REF Project Management Group on the approach to, and management of, Exeter's RE2029 submission. This group will be constituted to support the preparations for REF2029. It will be chaired by the ADVC-RQ&I and will meet biannually with the possibility of contributions via email between meetings if required.

The REF2029 Expert Advisory Group Terms of Reference

- To advise on the management of REF2029 preparation and submission, including the development and implementation of policies, procedures and processes.
- To shape and inform institutional documentation prepared as part of the REF process.
- To advise on arrangements relating to specific policy issues. These might include, for example, Exeter's approach to cross-referral, pre-submission reviews, double-weighting, EDI and SPRE.
- To provide information to help identify strengths and weaknesses in Exeter's overarching REF2029 submission and, having identified weaknesses, suggest actions to improve the submission.

REF2029 Expert Advisory Group Membership

Former and current REF panel members and other members of the University will be co-opted to be in attendance as required.

Technician Commitment Working group

Purpose

The Technician Commitment working group's aim is to ensure visibility, recognition, career development, and sustainability of technical careers. The services identified as being in-scope are:

- Research Software Engineers,
- the Library and Heritage Collections staff including Digital Humanities,
- IT Services, and
- Digital.

Role in REF 2029 preparation

All staff in a technical role will be able to participate in the outputs review exercise and nominate outputs for selection. Where outputs are nominated that have a sole substantive link to a staff contract that comes under the technical umbrella, the Technician Commitment Working group will identify if the contract can be considered to have an expectation of research activity and could be considered to have an eligible employment relationship, for the purposes of identifying output eligibility. This will be determined by factors including Reporting Unit (e.g., Research and Facilities) and/or Grade. If considered to have an expectation of research activity, they will be able to nominate their outputs through the annual outputs review process and assign to a UoA in accordance with our CoP process.

Technician Commitment Working Group Terms of Reference

The Technician Commitment is a commitment made by the university to enhance the Career Development, Sustainability, Recognition and Visibility of technical staff. The working group's aim is to make continual progress against the university's action plan, and to work cross-department and cross-service to implement these improvements.

The group meets monthly to ensure continual progress, usually on the second Monday of the month.

The group report back into the REF Project Team.

The university's self-assessment and subsequent action plan is approved at UEB level.

Membership of the Technician Commitment Working group

- Projects & Operations Manager, Technical Strategy & Operations (TSO) (Chair)
- Director of Technical Strategy & Operations
- Faculty Partner for ESE Devon, TSO
- Technical Operations Manager, TSO
- Technical Manager, TSO
- Deputy Head of Research Software Engineering (RSA)
- Business Manager, IT Services
- Scrum Master, Digital
- Digital
- Head of Digital Humanities, Library
- Interim Head of Heritage Collections, Library

REF2029 UoA Output Selection Panel

Purpose

To support the UoA Lead in the Output assignment and selection process including oversight of nomination, review, moderation, selection and communication processes. This group provides discipline insight and knowledge to inform the UoA Leads recommendations in accordance with the Code of Practice, and the templates and guidance provided by the REF Team.

The REF2029 UoA Selection Panel Terms of Reference

- Provide input into the review and moderation process
- To provide insight and knowledge of discipline structures to inform UoA allocations
- Make recommendations for Output selection to REF2029 UoE Main Panel Groups via feedback to UoA lead
- Make recommendations for Output UoA allocations to REF2029 UoE Main Panel Groups via feedback to UoA lead
- Review process and agree in accordance with Exeter's Code of Practice

Membership of the REF2029 UoA Selection Panel

- UoA Lead (Chair)
- Discipline-specific members to represent full breadth of the UoA.
- Other members of the University will be co-opted to be in attendance as required.

REF2029 Impact Review Panel

Purpose

The REF2029 Impact Review Panel is responsible for reviewing individual case studies collective scores provided by the reviewers and agree the assessment outcomes, providing recommendations to the REF2029 UoE Main Panels and feedback to individual case study authors.

The REF2029 Impact Review Panel Terms of Reference

- Provide input into the review and moderation process
- To provide qualitative feedback to case study authors
- To provide insight and knowledge of discipline structures to inform UoA allocations
- Make recommendations for Impact Case study selection to REF2029 UoE Main Panel Groups via feedback to UoA lead
- Make recommendations for Impact Case study UoA allocations to REF2029 UoE Main Panel Groups via feedback to UoA lead Review process and agree in accordance with Exeter's Code of Practice

Membership of the REF2029 Impact Review Panel

- Assistant Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research Quality and Impact) (ADVC-RQ&I) (Chair)
- Head of Performance and REF
- Impact Evidence and Evaluation Manager (policy and systems)
- Former and current REF panel members
- Assistant Director of the Sector and Corporate Partnerships Team (Advisory role)
- Partnership and Development Team Lead for HASS, HLS & ESE, Exeter Innovation (Advisory role)
- Impact Evidence and Evaluation Officer for HASS, HLS & ESE (Advisory role)

REF2029 Project Management Team

Purpose

The REF team within Research Services provides the day-to-day central support for the preparations of Exeter's REF2029 submission, working closely with Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research Quality and Impact) (ADVC-RQ&I), UoA leads, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Impact), the Directors of Research and Impact and with other Professional Services as required.

The Project Management Team will manage and implement the delivery of Exeter's REF2029 Submission taking advice from across Professional Services as necessary.

The REF Project Management Group's Terms of Reference

- To ensure that progress is made and deadlines are met in accordance with the university strategy and REF2029 timetable.
- To ensure that the REF2029 process at Exeter is managed successfully, identifying roles and responsibilities and coordinating across Faculties and Services.

The University of Exeter REF2029 Code of Practice

- To manage and share communications about the policy and operational aspects of the REF2029; To report to RIEC on progress with the REF2029 preparations and to carry out actions as instructed by RIEC.
- To report to the REF2029 Expert Advisory Group and to carry out actions as advised.
- To ensure that the REF2029 procedures, policies and systems are compatible with Exeter's procedures, policies and systems.
- Manage and implement Exeter's REF2029 submission

Membership of the REF Project Management Group

- Assistant Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research Quality and Impact) (ADVC-RQ&I)
- Associate Director of Research Performance, Culture and Doctoral College
- Head of Performance and REF
- Research Information Systems and Evaluation Manager
- Research and Impact Coordinator (REF2029)
- Impact Evidence and Evaluation Manager
- Policy Manager (SPRE/Research EDI)
- REF2029 Administrator
- Additional Professional Services representatives may be co-opted on a specific basis, for example, Library, EDI, Systems Lead: Exeter IT representative, Information Governance/Data Protection lead: Compliance, Governance and Risk representative



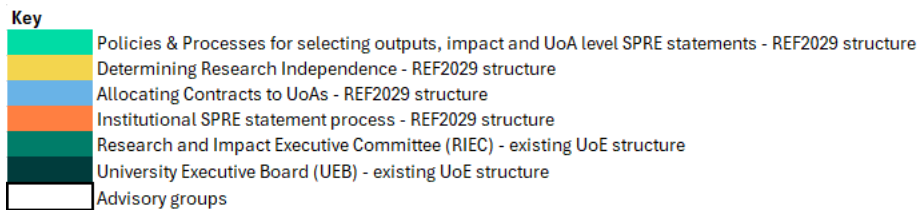


Figure 16: Governance structure for decision-making and recommendations for REF 2029 processes

Roles and responsibilities for decision-making and key REF2029 recommendations

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research and Impact)

The DVC (R&I) as the senior member of the university accountable for the development and delivery of Exeter's REF2029 submission is the sponsor for REF2029. The DVC (R&I) makes the final decision for all matters relating to Exeter's REF2029 submission with approval from UEB. The DVC (R&I) has the responsibility to ensure that all policies and processes have been implemented in a manner which supports a transparent and robust approach. The DVC (R&I) will make all institutional decisions regarding Exeter's REF2029 with the advice of RIEC, e.g. final decisions on the shape of each UoA submission. Specific UoA-based decisions, e.g. output or impact selection, can be escalated to the DVC (R&I) for final decision-making.

The DVC (R&I) delegates to Assistant Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research Quality and Impact) (ADVC-RQ&I):

- Responsibility for the REF2029 strategic & operational plan
- Unit of Assessment submission oversight
- Approval of REF policies/strategies
- Line management of Unit of Assessment Leads (UoAL).

Assistant Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research Quality and Impact) (ADVC-R&I)

The ADVC-RQ&I is responsible for the strategic leadership of Exeter's REF2029 preparations and submission of REF2029 including:

- Oversight of REF UoA leads to help drive forward our Research and Impact strategy, including commitments for strategy 2030 to support a successful submission to REF2029.
- Support the DVC R&I in our commitment to develop and support people and ideas to create a vibrant research culture and environment leading to improved research quality.
- Working with the DVC R&I to provide strategic leadership for the University on all issues related to research impact.
- Develop and implement a strategic impact delivery plan that will deliver a demonstrable increase in the quality of impactful research by 2030.
- Lead the development of an output assessment and monitoring program and staff development initiatives to enhance the quality of research outputs.

- Lead the development of impact case studies across the University, supporting faculties, promoting best practice, targeting areas for improvement and monitoring progress.

Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor

The PVC/Executive Dean is a full member of the University's Executive Board.

Faculty Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Impact)

The Associate PVCs for Research & Impact are full members of RIEC.

REF UoA Lead

The REF UoA Lead provides a holistic overview of the UoA outside of department and Faculty structures, reflective of the interdisciplinary nature of research at the University of Exeter. The role has strategic and operational responsibility for the UoA-level submission, reporting to the ADVU-RQ&I and works closely with relevant Heads of Department, Directors of Research and Impact, Department Managers and other academic departmental director roles (e.g., Business, Engagement and Innovation, Global Engagement, Wellbeing, Inclusion and Culture) to ensure progress with preparations for a strong submission.

The REF UoA lead is responsible for the preparations, strategies, selection and submission of all the research-related components of the UoA's submission. This requires working closely with the relevant departmental leadership team to implement REF policies and procedures within Schools/Department in accordance with Exeter's Code of Practice.

Directors of Research and/or Impact

The Directors of Research and/or Impact is a full member of the Faculty Executive Board.

Head of Department (HoD)

The Head of Department a full member of the Faculty Executive Board.

Department Managers

Support HoDs in delivering the strategic and operational priorities of the department. Department Managers maintain records of the activity and resources within the department in accordance with Exeter's policies and procedures.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Divisional Director of Research

The Divisional Director leads the Research Division which includes Research Services and is responsible to the DVC (R&I) for ensuring that the appropriate support is available from Professional Services to support Exeter's levels of preparedness for REF2029; and to develop and deliver Exeter's submission to REF2029. The Director of Research owns the following risks identified within the RIEC Risk Register:

- Ensuring confidence in Exeter's management of REF2029 preparations.

- Failure to compile and submit UoEs REF 2029 return in a timely manner or in full due to inadequate management of process.

Assistant Director of Research Performance, Culture and Doctoral College

The Associate Director of Research Performance, Culture and Doctoral College is responsible to the Director of Research and responsible for working with the DVC Research & Impact and DVC People & Culture to develop and implement research culture strategy; working with the ADVC Research Quality & Impact on oversight of preparations and strategy for the REF, including the delivery of support for research and impact performance exercises and overseeing the policies, procedures and infrastructure in place to support the submission. The role is responsible for the central REF budget, for monitoring and mitigating the following risks identified within the RIEC Risk Register:

- Failure to secure a successful outcome in REF2029 – one which maintains or improves Exeter’s position relative to previous REF and/or competitor group [Risk owner: DVC (R&I)]
- Ensuring confidence in Exeter’s management of REF2029 preparations. [Risk owner: Director of Research]
- Failure to compile and submit UoEs REF 2029 return in a timely manner or in full due to inadequate management of process. [Risk owner: Director of Research]

Head of Performance and REF

The Head of Performance and REF is responsible for the day-to-day management of Exeter’s policies, processes and infrastructure to support the development and delivery of Exeter’s submissions and operational oversight of the REF budget.

The Head of Performance and REF is responsible for monitoring and mitigating the following risks:

- Failure to secure a successful outcome in REF2029 – one which maintains or improves Exeter’s position relative to the previous REF and/or competitor group [Risk owner: DVC (R&I)]
- Ensuring confidence in Exeter’s management of REF2029 preparations. [Risk owner: Director of Research].

Research Services (RS) Faculty Partners

Providing the key strategic interface between Faculty management teams and the Research Services; Ensuring alignment of University and Faculty strategy, planning and prioritisation and maintaining an oversight of the faculty’s portfolio for research. Supporting key REF2029 communications and being an advisory point of contact for the REF Team.

Appendix 4: Conflicts of Interest Policy

The University of Exeter's REF2021 Code of Practice adopted the arrangements for recording declarations of interest and avoiding potential conflicts of interest as set out in Annex D of the REF2021 Panel Criteria and Working Methods for REF main and sub-panel chairs, members, assessors, observers, secretaries and advisers.

The University will continue relying on these arrangements as the basis for the REF2029 Code of Practice, until such time as the REF2029 Panel Criteria and Working Methods documentation is published, at which point it will adopt any updated arrangements outlined in the documentation.

The University adheres to the principles of equity, equality and transparency in its approach for dealing with actual or perceived conflicts of interest. All University of Exeter staff involved in decision making and supporting the REF exercise will observe the arrangements adopted by the University for managing potential conflicts of interest.

Major and minor interests

Members of staff are required to declare a major conflict of interest in relation to:

- any financial or commercial interest conflicts in relation to research or other professional activity
- any minor interest(s) determined by the REF governance structure to be treated as a major interest.

Any member of staff – irrespective of role or responsibility in delivering the University of Exeter's REF2029 submission – who is involved in decision-making or assessment must declare their interest to the Head of Performance and REF using the following email address: research-performance@exeter.ac.uk. This will allow supporting staff to ensure that specific decisions relating to that individual, are not made by the conflicted member of staff. Similarly, where relevant, specific information relating to that individual (e.g. an embargoed output or a confidential impact case study) will not be shared with the conflicted member of staff.

Any interest that could lead a reasonable observer to doubt the impartiality of a member of staff with decision-making responsibility (e.g. a familial relationship), that is not a major interest, must be declared by that panel member as a minor interest. Minor interests should be declared on an ad hoc basis to Head of Performance and REF using the following email address: research-performance@exeter.ac.uk to ensure that the information is captured and acted upon.

Management of Conflict of Interest

The Head of Performance and REF will review each conflict of interest and decide how the interest is to be managed:

- Declaring the interest in the log and/or at specific meetings/committees
- Ensuring that the individual is not involved in discussions of certain matters
- Ensuring that the individual is not involved in decisions of certain matters
- Referring to others regarding matters requiring discussion or decision.

Approaches for management of conflicts will be communicated with the staff member declaring the interest and with relevant decision-making and support staff, as needed, to ensure that decisions are not made by staff, where a known conflict of interest exists, and where the interest is relevant to the decision being made.

Decisions on any breaches to this policy, will follow the procedure outlined in the University of Exeter's Conflict of Interest policy⁸ or if relevant, will follow the University's Exeter policy and procedure for Public Interest Disclosure Policy and Public interest Disclosure Procedure.⁹ Where the Head of Performance and REF has an interest, decisions on management of any breaches will, in the first instance, be referred to the Divisional Director of Research.

Appendix 5: Confidentiality Policy

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 and the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Similarly, all University of Exeter REF Decision makers and those involved in supporting REF preparations are bound by the same confidentiality requirements.

Where disclosure of confidential information is required to support the preparation and submission to REF2029 it will be disclosed via a confidential inbox (confidentialref2029@exeter.ac.uk) with limited access to the Head of Performance and REF and nominated colleagues.

Any confidential data relating to the REF2029 submission or REF2029 preparations will be held in Sharepoint sites, where access will be strictly controlled by permission groups related to formal roles, and marked as confidential where appropriate.

The REF2029 process allows for arrangements for sensitive (including commercially sensitive) outputs and impact case studies and those requiring security clearances to be kept confidential. Arrangements will be made to ensure adherence to these requirements within the University of Exeter. Access to such information will be limited to specific members of staff, depending on the level of confidentiality required.

A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) is being completed and actions will be put in place to mitigate any risks identified.

Confidential Impact case studies and research outputs

This section sets out our policy for the management of confidential impact case studies and research outputs for nomination, review and for the final REF submission. This draws on information in the REF2021 Guidance on Submissions and will be superseded by relevant REF2029 guidance, once released.

While all reviewers, UoA selection panels, decision makers and observers will be asked to respect the confidentiality of all submissions, where case studies or outputs deal with matters of national security or contain commercially sensitive or other sensitive information, specific arrangements will be made for storage, review and submission.

Security/government

Government security classification includes the following categories:

Classification	Description
OFFICIAL	'The majority of information that is created, processed, sent or received in the public sector and by partner organisations, which could cause no more than moderate damage if compromised and must be defended against a broad range of threat actors with differing capabilities using nuanced protective controls.' OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE is not a separate classification tier. The -SENSITIVE marking should be applied to OFFICIAL information that is not intended for public release and that is of at least some interest to threat actors (internal or external), activists or the media and/or is likely to cause moderate damage to the work or reputation of the organisation

	and/or Her Majesty's Government (HMG). Such information must be handled using the additional marking and with other additional controls
SECRET	'Very sensitive information that requires enhanced protective controls, including the use of secure networks on secured dedicated physical infrastructure and appropriately defined and implemented boundary security controls, suitable to defend against highly capable and determined threat actors, whereby a compromise could threaten life (an individual or group), seriously damage the UK's security and/or international relations, its financial security/stability or impede its ability to investigate serious and organised crime.'
TOP SECRET	'Exceptionally sensitive information assets that directly support or inform the national security of the UK or its allies AND require an extremely high assurance of protection from all threats with the use of secure networks on highly secured dedicated physical infrastructure, and robustly defined and implemented boundary security controls'

Permission to nominate for review

Where an impact case study or research output author, REF UoA lead, Director of Research & Impact, member of the REF team and/or decision maker is aware that a potential impact case study or nominated research output may include information of national security, they should alert the Exeter REF team (research-performance@exeter.ac.uk) or their Faculty IEEO as soon as possible.

Where the material to be included in an impact case study or research output can only be made available for assessment to individuals with national security vetting clearance, the University of Exeter, as the submitting HEI, must request advance permission from the Research England REF director to nominate for review. The deadlines for request are to be confirmed. The University will submit the request on the case study author's behalf.

Storage and access

Impact case studies classified as OFFICIAL (i.e, the baseline classification for all Government documents) will be stored on the University's Sharepoint site. This site is owned by the Exeter REF team. Access control is in place, and file visibility is restricted to a need to know basis. Impact case study authors and Directors of Impact should alert the Exeter REF team if a case contains sensitive information. Further access control can be arranged as appropriate.

An impact case study which contains material falling under the SECRET or TOP SECRET classification, and any supporting material, will be stored as hard copies only, in a secure location managed by staff with appropriate security clearance.

Research outputs are not held by the central team and will be subject to local storage conditions suitable to their security classification.

Access to case studies and/or research outputs containing SECRET and above material will only be made available to individuals with appropriate national security) vetting clearance, such as Security Clearance (SC) and Developed Vetting (DV).

All movement of any such documents containing SECRET and above material will 1) be via hard copies only, and 2) only be handled by staff with relevant national security clearance.

Review

Any documents containing SECRET and above material will only be reviewed by up to two of those named individuals with relevant national security clearance. They will complete scoring and

commentary in line with review guidance and without disclosing any sensitive material within the document.

Should there be a need for external review, only those with appropriate clearance will be approached.

All other documentation will be reviewed in accordance with the processes outlined in this CoP, where the confidential handling of material is standard practice. Impact case study and research output authors, REF UoA lead, Director of Research & Impact, member of the REF team and/or decision maker should alert the Exeter REF team if a document contains additional sensitive information, to allow for the appropriate measure to be put in place. For example, restricting user access or providing additional instructions to reviewers.

REF2029 Assessment, following submission

Special arrangements will be made for impact case study and research output authors/other named individuals to make any impact case study/research output, with SECRET and above material, securely available to named panel members/REF assessors with the appropriate clearance. The Research England REF team will also have checked to ensure that there are no direct conflicts of interest.

Only outline information about the impact case study/research output will be available to the panel and no details of the impact case study/research output will be published.

All OFFICIAL impact case studies/research outputs will be assessed by REF panelists without special arrangements. However, any that are OFFICIAL- Sensitive may be identified as requiring additional measures. Authors, REF UoA lead, Director of Research & Impact, member of the wider REF team and/or decision maker should contact the Exeter REF team to discuss these measures.

OFFICIAL-Sensitive impact case studies/research outputs may be identified as “Not for Publication” or “Redacted” if specific elements should be removed for REF publication. Authors, REF UoA lead, Director of Research & Impact, member of the REF team and/or decision maker should contact the Exeter REF team to discuss publishing needs.

Commercially sensitive or containing other sensitive information

Apart from national security concerns, there may be situations where information is sensitive for other reasons, for example, due to commercial sensitivities or because the work has been carried out with vulnerable communities

Identifying sensitive impact case studies and/or research outputs

Any author, REF UoA lead, Director of Research & Impact, member of the wider REF team and/or decision maker concerned that impact case study/research output is commercially sensitive or containing other sensitive information should discuss this with their Faculty IEEO or the Exeter REF team as soon as possible.

Through that process they will need to identify if the impact case study/research output should be identified as “Not for publication” or “Redacted” where only specific elements are redacted.

UoA leads will be asked to identify case studies which cannot be published by REF or which will need redaction as part of annual review at the UoE REF Main panel meetings

Prior permission from REF is not required but status as “Not for Publication” or “Redacted” will need to be clearly identified when making the REF submission. These impact case studies/research

outputs will be submitted to REF through the submission portal but, where required, will only be handled or viewed by a restricted group of individuals.

Storage and access

As the REF submission is being prepared, the impact case studies/research outputs will be stored in a restricted area on the Research & Impact Sharepoint site.

Access to those items and supporting materials will be restricted to a need-to-know only basis (e.g. author(s), the REF UoA lead, named members of the Exeter REF team and specific reviewers).

Review

The Exeter REF team will discuss with the REF UoA Lead or author the particular needs of each impact case study/research output to ensure confidentiality during the review process. This will include not only understanding and identifying acceptable reviewers, but also provision of information from the review to the REF UoA lead and chair of the relevant output selection or impact panel, including consideration of how the case might be discussed, if at all, at the relevant Panel meeting.

For impact case studies/research outputs with commercially sensitive information: we will first check existing contractual arrangements or existing non-disclosure agreements (NDA) to ensure if the information can be used within these restricted circumstances and whether specific individuals involved in review, review or selection panel may view these documents on a “need-to-know” basis. In most cases, an undertaking that the University as whole is bound by confidentiality is likely to be sufficient.

Should special permission be required from an organisation or individual, these will be negotiated, agreed and undertaken. For example, where reviewers or panel members may be required to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA). The Head of Performance and REF will also maintain a list of impact case studies/research outputs where there may be a conflict of interest within the University. Such cases will be identified by the REF UoA Lead in the UOA overview. Any parties identified as having a conflict of interest will not see the items or any of the supporting information.

Where a reviewer or member of a review/selection Panel has a conflict of interest, this information will not be shared and conflicted Panel members will leave the meeting during any discussion of the sensitive items.

If permission to share this sensitive information with is withheld by the external organisation or individual, or if any decision maker, reviewer, member of a Panel has a conflict of interest the case study will be restricted to the REF UoA lead, specific reviewers and specific members of the REF team. Only outline information will be provided to any Panel which will include scoring and commentary from the reviewers, and any comments on progress which do not disclose any sensitive information and any inappropriate exposure to intellectual property.

If such a case is to be sent for external review, access for a named person will be managed securely through Sharepoint.

REF 2029 Assessment post submission

The University is permitted to notify REF of any particular main or sub-panel members who we believe would have a conflict of interest in assessing an impact case study/research output.

The Head of Performance and REF will create and maintain a list of such items as the final submission is decided and as REF 2029 panel members are announced and will make the appropriate representations when the University of Exeter’s submission is made.

Publication

We will need to provide redacted versions suitable for publication by the deadline provided by the REF. Any items identified as 'not for publication' or the elements for 'redaction' will be destroyed by the (national) REF team once no longer required for assessment purposes.

Appendix 6: Appeals Policy and Process

Background context

The decoupling of individuals from outputs means that staff are no longer submitted to the REF exercise. The submission is a collective effort at disciplinary level and decisions on which outputs contribute to the submission will be made strategically, with the aim of providing a representative sample of excellent research. To that end, staff will not routinely receive information on estimated grades of nominated outputs or if their outputs are selected for submission. The exclusion of any nominated outputs to Exeter's REF submission will not cause any detriment to staff. This same consideration can also be given to decisions on impact case studies and research independence.

What this policy covers

This policy covers appeals relating to:

- The process for independent researcher status
- The process for eligible employment status (EER) and substantive link to an output
- The selection of outputs and impact case studies process for submission to REF2029

Who this policy applies to

This policy covers members of staff on either permanent or fixed-term contracts who wish to appeal decisions based on the areas listed above. The policy applies in respect of a member of staff who has requested and received notification relating to their independent researcher status, the selection of outputs and the EER, where they are the staff member with the substantive link.

Grounds for appeal

Appeals can be brought forward on the following grounds:

- Failure to follow the policies and/or procedures for determining researcher independence or outputs selection as laid out in the Code of Practice
- Failure to follow the University's legal obligations
- Incorrect assessment of the Research England guidelines

The following types of appeal are excluded from the procedure set out in this policy:

- Appeals regarding a disagreement with a decision of a decision-making body;
- Appeals on the basis of insufficient evidence having been submitted when the request was first put forward;
- A matter which is currently subject to litigation or legal proceedings.
- The matter has previously been through the appeals procedure in line with this policy and has been closed.
- Appeals made by staff with a role determining the shape of a submission to overturn a decision made by a decision-making body or role.

Lodging an appeal

The appeal must be submitted in writing to the Appeals Panel using the following email address: confidentialref2029@exeter.ac.uk

The member of staff will be notified in writing and be advised of the procedures for appeal, including the time limit for lodging an appeal, to whom an appeal should be addressed and the procedure which will be followed at the appeal panel.

Appeals can be lodged no later than July 2028, to meet the timelines for submission deadline.

The REF2029 Appeals Panel

The REF 2029 Appeal Panel will be chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (of either Cornwall or Education and Student Experience) who is not involved in any other University of Exeter REF decision-making processes, except as a member of the University Executive Board (UEB). The Panel membership will be:

- TBD (Chair – also a member of UEB, DVC of Cornwall or of Education and Student Experience)
- The Director of Research (Deputy Chair)
- Senior HR Business Partner (Peoples Services Representative)
- 2 Academic members.

The REF2029 Appeal Panel will be advised by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team. The decision of the REF2029 Appeal Panel will be final within the procedures of the University and staff will not have recourse to the Grievance Procedure for grievances related to REF2029. All appeals will be concluded before the REF2029 submission deadline.

The purpose of the Appeal Meetings in these circumstances will be to consider whether the decision taken by the relevant decision-making body or roles is correct whilst also considering if the appeal is trivial, vexatious or invalid. The substance of the appeal will not be considered any further than is necessary to do this.

The Appeal Meeting may:

- **Uphold the decision** taken by the decision body/roles, determining also, where relevant, if the appeal is trivial/vexatious/invalid. In this case there shall be no further right of appeal.
- **Determine that further information is required** and invite the member of staff to supply further information and to invite them to appear in person and may be accompanied by a trade union representative or fellow worker.
- **Determine that the decision** taken by the decision body/role **is not upheld** on the basis of not following the policies and procedures of the Code of Practice, of not fulfilling the University's legal obligations or, in the case of complex circumstances, an incorrect assessment of the Research England guidance. The relevant REF decision-making body/roles will be notified and required to review and reconsider the decision taken.

The individual raising the appeal will be notified within 10 working days of the Appeals Panel. The meeting dates of the Appeals Panel will be made available.

Research England will be launching its Complaints and Whistleblowing procedures in relation to REF2029. The details of this process and guidance on what falls within its remit will be made available by Research England before the submission deadline and will be shared by the University to all staff, via the all-staff REF communication pages. It is expected that their process will have an expectation that, where relevant and feasible, an individual will have exhausted the University's own appeals process first before engaging with the Research England's own process.

Appendix 7: EDI Training

Mandatory Training for all staff

The University of Exeter provides mandatory, online Diversity in the Workplace training to all new staff, which must be refreshed every 2 years. In addition, staff with line-management responsibility are required to attend training on Professional Development Review (Professional Services staff) or Academic Development Conversations (Academic staff, covers PDR, Promotions and 1:1s) and any staff member sitting on a recruitment panel must take the Recruitment and Selection course; considerations of equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded within these courses. All staff with decision making responsibilities for the REF will be expected to be up to date with their mandatory training.

Additional resources, volunteering, training and mentorship

The University of Exeter provides additional resources, volunteering, training and mentoring opportunities that promote equality, diversity and inclusion within the workplace, including:

- Leadership resources to support creating and enabling a diverse workforce, checking bias and managing/reporting inappropriate behaviour [Leadership | Equality, Diversity and Inclusion | University of Exeter](#)
- [Bystander Training](#)
- External mentorship schemes including: Aurora ([Advance HE programme](#), Leadership development programme for women), 100 Black Women Professors NOW (the [Women's Higher Education Network](#)), [Elevate](#) (leadership and development programme for women from minority ethnic groups), [Stonewall LGBTQ+ Young Leaders Programme](#)
- [Internal mentorship training](#)
- Leadership programme ([Leadership Difference](#))
- [Dignity and Respect Advisor](#)
- [Speak Out Guardians](#)

Training for Decision makers

Specific training is being commissioned to support REF2029 decision making, which will be mandatory for all groups listed in the governance structure (see Appendix 3) and for all roles listed as having decision making responsibilities.

Training will be delivered in-house by the REF team, with input from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) team, and will focus on Mitigating Bias for Decision Makers. This will be a mixture of online and in-person training, with resources to support the ongoing identification and challenging of bias. It will be delivered in the 1st half of the 2026/27 academic year. The EDI team will also offer the opportunity for online face-to-face training to new decision makers in June and September 2028, if needed.

We will work with the EDI team on providing additional online resources on Unconscious Bias that can be shared more widely, for example to staff involved in review.

In addition, training will also include consideration of responsible research assessment and the appropriate use of metrics.

Appendix 8: Consultation and Communication Plan for the Code of Practice

Table 1 below outlines the consultation and communication activity around the development of the Code of Practice

The communications around the CoP are ongoing within the university, with the view that this enables both an education and review approach to REF2029 and receiving feedback from the community.

The engagement activities related to the development of the Code of Practice have been institution-wide (through open meetings), at Faculty and discipline-level and with specific groups including the University and College Union (UCU). Through an iterative process, changes have been made to policies and processes as a result of those engagements.

The process of consultation and communication of the Code of Practice in development occurred in two stages with different phases of development at each stage:

Table 1: Communications plan and timeline for development of the CoP.

Stage	Consultation	Communication
Stage 1 Development and approval of the first draft of the Code of Practice outlining identification of significant responsibility for research in staff contracts in relation to the volume measure. Development of consultation plan and the the consultation questions for Stage 1. January 2025 – March 2025	With the REF2029 Project Team, The Research and Impact Executive Committee (RIEC) and members of the EDI team reviewing and approving the draft and the questions posed.	Cascaded communication to REF UoA leads and Directors of Research & Impact from the discussions at RIEC Update on REF guidance on volume measure and REF101 on internal Sharepoint communications site for all staff.
Stage 1: Open consultation on the approved Stage 1 draft of the CoP. March 2025 – April 2025	Open consultation to all staff and trade unions inviting written responses (either individual or group response). Individual responses were anonymous. The consultation questions asked about whether approaches were fair and equitable, suggested alternatives to approaches and any other comments. Additionally, the consultation asked whether to include	The consultation was launched by an email from the Assistant Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research Quality and Impact to all staff and by email to all Associate Pro Vice-Chancellors of Research and Directors of Research and Impact, with a request to cascade the

	a section on impact case study selection	invitation to all staff within departments. The draft was published on an internal website, with access to all staff along with a briefing document and slide set outlining the background context. Two open drop-in sessions were held to outline the REF2029 guidance on the volume measure and the process we outlined in the draft CoP. We also emailed the Early careers network and held meetings with the trade unions, including UCU, and Technical Services and Operations where we gave presentations on REF2029 and the volume measure. Reminder emails were sent in the last week of the consultation
Stage 1: Analysis of responses, revisions and approval of the Stage 1 draft of the Code of Practice. April 2025 – June 2025	The consultation responses were reviewed by the central REF team and they put forward recommendations for revisions to the Code of Practice drawn from the consultation responses. The CoP was updated and the revised Stage 1 draft was then approved by RIEC, Senate & UEB	Summary of the consultation responses, changes and approved draft were added to the REF Sharepoint communication site for all-staff and all staff will be updated by email (via cascade from Department/Service leads, as well as direct email to relevant networks, committees etc by the central REF team)
Stage 2: Development of the Stage 2 draft of the Code of Practice for the selection of outputs, impact case studies, introduction, policies &	With the REF2029 Project Team, The Research and Impact Executive Committee (RIEC) and members of the EDI team reviewing and approving the draft and the questions posed.	Cascaded communication to REF UoA leads and Directors of Research & Impact from the discussions at RIEC Update on REF guidance on outputs selection and

governance, EIA. Development of Stage 2 consultation questions September-December 2025		REF101 on internal Sharepoint communications site for all staff.
Stage 2: Open & final consultation on the draft CoP. 5 th January to 23 rd January 2026	Open consultation to all staff inviting written responses (either individual or group response). Individual responses will be anonymous. The consultation will include trade unions, including UCU and will be targeted to all research-enabling staff. The consultation questions will ask if approaches are fair and equitable, suggested alternatives to approaches and any other comments.	The consultation was launched by an email from the Assistant Deputy Vice- Chancellor, Research Quality and Impact to all staff and by email to all Associate Pro Vice- Chancellors and Directors of Research and Impact, with a request to cascade the invitation to all staff within departments. The draft was published on an internal website, with access to all staff along with a briefing document and slide set outlining the background context. At least two open drop-in sessions were held to outline the REF2029 guidance on the volume measure and the processes we outlined in the draft CoP. We also cascaded details on the consultation are to Early Career researchers, via the ECR network, and to the Equality groups and equality networks (listed in para 22). We also consulted with Trade Unions and research enabling staff through presentations as well as cascade via service leaders. For staff on long-term leave and/or secondments/field studies, the invitation to

		participate in the consultation will be communicated via employee-approved contact emails, either shared in out of office emails or given to departments.
Stage 2: Analysis of responses and revisions to the Code of Practice. February 2026	The consultation responses were reviewed by the central REF team and they put forward recommendations for revisions to the Code of Practice drawn from the consultation responses. The responses were discussed and modified with members of UCU. The CoP was updated in light of discussions and the revised final draft will be approved by RIEC, Senate & UEB	Summary of the feedback and any updates to the CoP will be shared on Sharepoint for all staff to see.
Submission to Research England May 2026	The Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research & Impact will approve and final revisions from discussions at UEB and Senate and submit the CoP to Research England for approval	Summary of the consultation responses, changes and approved final draft will be added to the REF Sharepoint communication site for all staff and all staff will be updated by email (via cascade from Department/Service leads, as well as direct email to relevant networks, committees etc by the central REF team)
Stage 3: Further iterations between May - August 2026	Should Research England require further revisions to the Code of Practice, all staff will be consulted on any substantive amendments required.	All staff will be informed of the nature of any changes made and will be re-issued with the updated Code of Practice.

The communication programme for the implementation of the policies includes:

- Digital communications will signpost staff to resources on the University website (behind the single sign-on) which will include web pages, REF resources, brief bite-size videos explaining some of the key policies and processes, and drop-in sessions for staff to field any questions about the CoP.
- In addition, there will be regular opportunities for all staff to discuss REF and its associated procedures. This began in March 2025 with engagement activities and drop-in sessions regarding the Code of Practice and the volume measure. Throughout 2025, further targeted sessions were held to provide background and context on REF2029 for staff groups, including technical and operations staff, highlighting how their contributions to the REF are identified.
- A set of central Sharepoint pages, accessible to all staff and students, provides information about REF2029 and our institutional approach. This includes FAQ pages covering each independent arm of the REF (CKU, SPRE, E&I, Volume measure), and detailed information on how each category of staff can contribute to the REF.

Appendix 9: REF Outputs Monitoring & Review

Policy on Use of Output Grades

Introduction

Assessment of the quality of research outputs continues to be a key element of the Research Excellence Framework (REF). In REF2029 research outputs will be assessed as part of a new REF component 'Contribution to Knowledge & Understanding', which has a weighting of 55%. The production of the highest quality research outputs therefore remains a key part of our REF and wider research and impact strategy. Progress in our outputs quality profile for REF2029 is monitored through an annual outputs review exercise as part of our REF preparations. This policy sets out our approach to the use of output grades generated through the review process, with the aim of supporting the development of excellent research outputs and guiding individuals in nominating their strongest papers, to underpin our collective success in REF2029.

REF2029 context

In a change from REF2021, any output authored by a member of staff with an eligible employment relationship with the university at any point over the REF period can be included in the submission, and in any appropriate Unit of Assessment (UoA); there is no minimum or a maximum of outputs per author for REF2029.

This change of approach reflects the intention of the funding bodies to move REF further away from implicit individual attribution and further towards the assessment of how well organisations are supporting research excellence. The drivers for the change are to: reduce the extent to which the REF shapes or constrains individual career trajectories; recognise that culture is crucial to high quality research; better recognise the diversity of research types and outputs; capture the wider contributions of all those who support, enable and conduct research.

The new approach means: we can select our strongest outputs (whilst ensuring this selection is representative of the UoA's research areas, output types and collaborations); there will be no need for a process to account for individual circumstances (required in REF2021 where the threshold of one output was not met); more flexibility to recognise varied contributions to REF across outputs, impact and research culture.

REF outputs review process

To support our selection of outputs for submission to REF2029, eligible authors are expected to nominate their highest quality publications for review. The outputs review process is undertaken each year and is co-ordinated by the Unit of Assessment (UoA) Leads. UoA Leads engage internal and external reviewers in assessing outputs against the REF criteria on an 11-point scale which corresponds to the REF quality definitions. More information on eligible authors and on the REF criteria is provided as part of the communications on the annual outputs nomination process.

Who output grades will be shared with and for what purpose

The purpose of sharing output grades with authors and those in faculty and institutional leadership roles is to support research excellence and our collective success in REF2029 through fostering understanding of how papers are assessed against the REF criteria and to guide authors in producing and nominating high-quality papers for the REF2029 assessment.

The following people/roles will have access to the output grades:

- **UoA Leads:** have oversight of the outputs review process for REF and are responsible for calibration of grades and for convening panels to make the final selection for our REF2029 submission.
- **Nominating authors:** grades (and qualitative feedback to help contextualise the grade) will be automatically shared with the nominating author – or authors where more than one Exeter author has nominated the same paper – via Symplectic Elements. (Grades will only be shared with authors who nominated the paper through the annual process – system limitations mean it is not possible currently to share grades with all Exeter authors, but nominating authors can share grades with co-authors).
- **Members of UoA output selection panels:** UoA leads will convene panels to recommend the final selection of outputs for submission in REF2029; panel members will have access to output grades to support this activity.
- **Heads of Department, Directors of Research & Impact and Senior Academic Leads:** these departmental leaders will have access to output grades for the purpose of: advising individuals on developing high-quality research outputs, publication strategies and the nomination of their strongest outputs for REF2029; understanding the UoA outputs quality profile and any mitigating actions that are needed at department level to support the highest quality REF submission.
- **Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellors for Research & Impact:** senior faculty leaders are expected to have access to output grades to provide informed guidance on output selection, supporting an optimal and strategically balanced submission to REF 2029.
- **REF & Performance Team:** professional services colleagues who support the outputs review exercise will have access to the output grades for the purpose of administering the process and reporting/modelling on REF quality profiles.

Scope of use of output grades

The scope of use of the output grades is restricted solely to the purposes outlined above, which focus on the achievement of our collective success in REF2029.

We recognise that REF is a collective endeavour, to which individuals contribute in a range of ways across outputs, impact and research culture and environment.

Nominating authors are encouraged to discuss with colleagues, mentors, senior leaders and UoA leads the grades and feedback to support development, understanding of REF processes and consider lessons learnt for future output generation.

In this context, REF output grades will not be used in promotion or performance assessments (individuals should not use the REF output grades in promotion applications, and panel members should not seek these). We will make a statement to this effect in our REF2029 Code of Practice.

