

University of Suffolk REF Code of Practice

Institution name: University of Suffolk

Date of submission: May 2026 (approved August 2026)

Part 1: Introduction

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the United Kingdom's national system for assessing the quality and impact of research conducted in higher education institutions (HEIs). Overseen by Research England (on behalf of the four UK funding bodies), the REF provides a comprehensive and expert-led evaluation of research excellence across the sector. The next exercise, REF 2029, will assess research activity and outputs from the period 2021-2028.

The REF serves three interconnected purposes. Firstly, it informs the allocation of Quality-Related (QR) research funding to HEIs, providing institutions with the block-grant resource needed to sustain and develop their research capacity and environment. Secondly, it provides public accountability for investment in research, generating evidence of the broader economic, social, cultural, and civic benefits that university research delivers. Thirdly, it produces a sector-wide picture of the health, vitality, and sustainability of the UK research base, supporting strategic planning by funders, government, and institutions alike.

The REF operates as an expert review process assessing research quality. HEIs make submissions across specific subject areas, known as Units of Assessment (UoAs). Each UoA is assessed by an expert sub-panel working under the oversight of a main panel and supported by advisory panels. Submissions are evaluated across three elements:

1. Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding (quality of research outputs) (55%)
2. Engagement and Impact (25%)
3. Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE) (20%)

The University of Suffolk

Established in 2016, the University of Suffolk is a distinctive, student-centred civic higher education provider with a growing research community. Since our first Research Strategy was introduced in 2018, the University has strategically aligned this with Knowledge Exchange. Our Strategy for Research and Knowledge Exchange Excellence (2023-2030) encourages knowledge exchange with external organisations alongside research excellence and supports the Government's Modern Industrial Strategy and Suffolk's Economic Strategy and Growth Plan. Building on our success from REF 2021 with almost 70% of our outputs being classed as 'world-leading' or 'internationally excellent' and our Knowledge Excellence Framework (KEF) outcome in 2025, we are developing an intentionally inclusive research and knowledge exchange culture. In April 2024 we launched our initial Civic University Agreement along with our [Economic Impact Assessment](#), setting out a series of pledges to our communities to address the key regional challenges we face and drive positive change. As a Civic University, our strategy outlines our commitment to community and public engagement and contributing to economic and societal impacts.

In ten years, our research has already made a clear, focused and immediate impact. Based on our Ipswich campus, supporting approximately 2,000 undergraduate, 600 taught postgraduate and 125 postgraduate research students, the University employs a total of 520 staff across the academic workforce and professional services. We are a dynamic university, committed to place-based, civic and applied research. As an anchor institution for the East of England, the University generates research that is deeply connected to the needs and ambitions of Suffolk and the wider region — from health and social care to digital innovation, creative industries, environmental sustainability and social justice. The University made its first submission to REF in 2021 in one UoA, Social Work and Social Policy (UoA 20). Under the leadership of our Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Knowledge Exchange, our emergent research agenda and size allow for robust strategic and practical oversight of our developing research culture. We are planning a more substantial submission to REF 2029, to demonstrate the quality and reach of our research to a national audience and secure the QR funding to underpin our future research ambitions.

The University has two academic schools currently employing 244 academic staff, providing taught and research degree programmes across a variety of subjects – the School of Business, Arts, Social Sciences and Technology (BASST) and the School of Health, Sciences and Society (HSS). In addition to our two academic schools, we have four research institutes which also employ 12 permanent staff on research-only contracts:

- Institute for Social Justice and Crime
- Institute of Health and Wellbeing
- Suffolk Sustainability Institute
- Digital Futures Institute

As part of developing our research and knowledge exchange strategy, we also launched the Suffolk Centre for Culture and Heritage in October 2025, funded from HEIF, to support the development of interdisciplinary creative communities and practices. The new Centre is knowledge exchange focused with a view to developing research capacity to support future growth.

Our research institutes reflect our areas of research specialism and broadly reflect our planned REF 2029 UoAs. The staff in academic schools with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) also belong to a research institute.

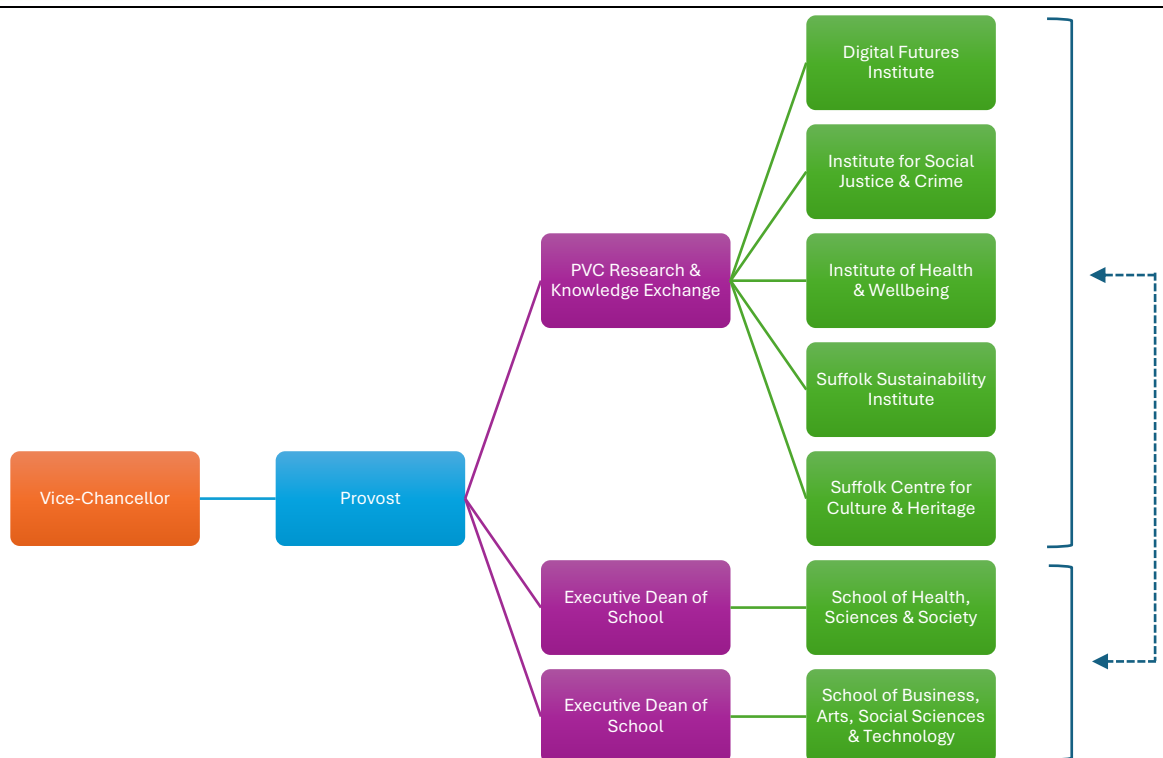


Figure 1: University of Suffolk academic structure for supporting research

This Code of Practice (CoP) sets out the processes, principles and governance arrangements that the University of Suffolk will follow in preparing its submission to REF 2029. Specifically, it describes how the University identifies staff with SRR who contribute to the REF volume measure and how research independence is determined for staff on research-only contracts. It outlines how eligible staff contracts are allocated to UoAs and how research outputs will be selected for submission. Our CoP ensures that all decisions made are in a manner consistent with the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and in compliance with all relevant legislation, including the Equality Act 2010.

REF Working Group

The REF Working Group provides institutional leadership, strategic oversight, coordination and governance of the University's preparations for REF 2029. The Group reports on progress and areas of potential risk to the Research and Enterprise Committee and Senate and is responsible for decision making in terms of UoAs to be submitted to REF, the allocation of staff contracts to UoAs, and the selection of outputs and impact case studies for submission within each UoA. The Group monitors progress against institutional REF milestones, identifies and manages risks associated with REF 2029 preparations and ensures that preparations are conducted with rigour, transparency and equity, and in full accordance with the published REF 2029 guidance and the University's approved Code of Practice. The Group ensures that EDI considerations are embedded throughout REF preparation and decision-making, informed by Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) outcomes which are reported to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and published on the staff intranet. The Group is responsible for open, transparent communications and acts as a forum for staff communication, consultation and engagement on REF matters.

The Research and Enterprise Committee has overall responsibility for the University's preparation and submission to REF, as part of its overarching strategic role in promoting and sustaining a culture of research, knowledge exchange and enterprise within the University.

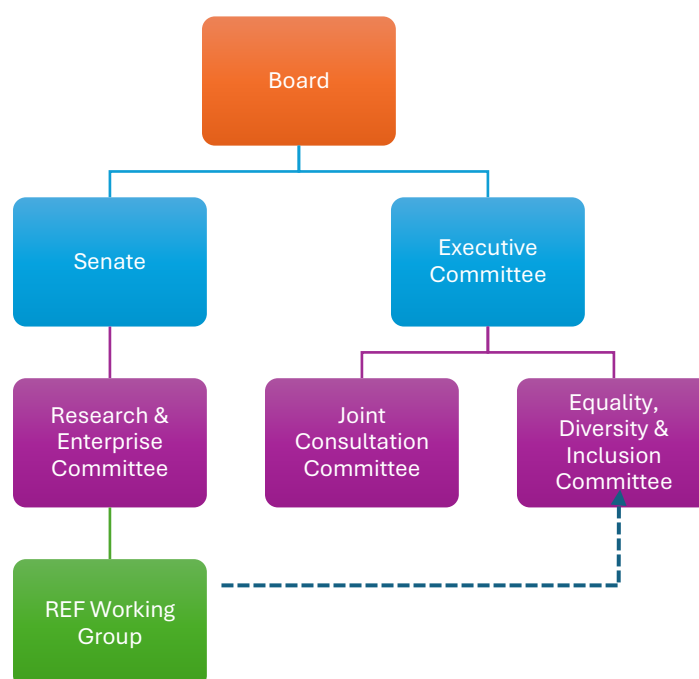


Figure 2: REF governance structure

The membership and terms of reference of the REF Working Group are provided in Appendix 1. The Working Group comprises:

Role	Rationale for inclusion in REF Working Group
Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Knowledge Exchange	Responsible for chairing the Working Group and overseeing the University's preparations for REF; institutional lead UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN)
Head of Research Degree Awarding Powers and REF	Deputy Chair, responsible for managing the University's preparations for REF
Unit of Assessment Leads/Co-Leads (9)	Strategic leads for REF 2029 unit level submissions (comprising Directors of Research Institutes/Centres and school-based co-leads, all at professorial level)
Associate Director, Research and Knowledge Exchange (Funding and Contracts)	To provide strategic guidance on the University's REF submission

Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange	To provide advice and guidance on the University's REF submission, with particular reference to the Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE) and Engagement and Impact elements; representative on the CoARA UK National Chapter
Senior Lecturer, Learning and Teaching Enhancement	To provide advice and guidance on responsible research assessment; Principal Investigator for CoARA project <i>Reforming Research Assessment: Building Inclusive, Open, and Equitable Evaluation Practices through Open Educational Resources</i> ; representative on the CoARA UK National Chapter
Independent External Advisor	To provide expert advice and guidance on REF from an external perspective
Data and Process Transformation Officer (People and Organisational Development)	To support work on equality impact assessment as part of preparations for REF
Culture, Organisational Development and Workforce Transformation Business Partner	To provide guidance on HR and EDI matters as they relate to REF preparations
Research Institute Coordinator	To provide secretarial support to the Working Group

The REF Working Group has overseen the development, consultation with staff and trade unions and approval of the University's REF 2029 Code of Practice, with final approval from the University's Executive.

Reporting to the Working Group, UoA Leads provide strategic leadership and are responsible for developing and implementing strategies to support research planning and enhance research quality, impact, and the overall research culture and environment within the UoA. UoA Leads have a clear role descriptor and play a key role in ensuring the delivery of a high-quality REF submission. They oversee the process for reviewing outputs and the allocation of potential outputs to UoAs. The role demands comprehensive expertise in research assessment processes and a dedication to training, mentoring and supporting other staff to build their capacity and confidence to take on output reviews and other supportive roles within the UoA, ultimately developing talent to secure leadership continuity within the UoA. Where applicable, such as in larger UoAs or when the UoA Lead is employed part-time, the role may be shared between two Co-Leads to facilitate effective management and delivery.

1.1 Robustness, transparency, equity and inclusion

We are undertaking our preparation for REF 2029 with transparency, fairness and integrity, reflecting our commitment to the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. We have held the HR Excellence in Research Award since 2017, we are a Disability Confident Employer, a member of Race Equality Matters, we hold an Athena Swan Bronze Award (working towards Silver) and are a signatory of the Mindful Employer Charter. We are also signatories of the Coalition for Advancing Research

Assessment (CoARA) and are recognised as a case study institution for the Open and Responsible Researcher Reward and Recognition (OR4) project as part of the UKRN Open Research Programme.

Our CoP was developed in extensive and close consultation with our whole staff community as part of an overall programme of transformation. Informed by EIAs at each stage, it will be kept under review through our committees and governance structures throughout the REF 2029 cycle. This Code of Practice was approved by the Executive and submitted to the REF team in May 2026.

Upholding **the principle of robustness** embedded within the University's policies and processes, we are confident that the staff contracts identified as contributing to the REF volume measure reliably reflect the responsibilities of our academic staff. Following a new institutional structure introduced on 1 August 2025 (based on the two academic schools and the four research institutes), the University has established clear criteria and expectations for SRR in consultation with staff, revised its promotion criteria, reviewed its workforce plan and introduced a revised workload allocation model. The agreed definition of SRR was published in January 2026 and the new academic promotions framework will be introduced in 2026.

This robust process has ensured that staff contracts identified as contributing to volume measure reliably reflect the responsibilities of each staff member (see Part 2). Following the pan-university consultations between January 2025 and April 2026 (including union consultation via the Joint Consultation Committee), three clearly defined academic pathways will be introduced in 2026. These are directly mapped onto the relevant HESA academic employment function code, and help to determine eligibility for contribution to the REF volume measure in terms of SRR and Research Independence (RI):

Three academic pathways at the University of Suffolk

	Academic pathway	HESA academic employment function	SRR	RI	Contribution to REF volume measure
1	Learning, Teaching and Scholarship (LTS)	ACEMPFUN 1 (teaching only)	No	N/A	No
2	Learning, Teaching and Research (LTR)	ACEMPFUN 3 (teaching and research)	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE)	ACEMPFUN 2 (research only)	Yes	Yes	Yes
				No	No

All staff on the Learning, Teaching and Research pathway are deemed to have SRR and RI, with their contract qualifying for contribution to the REF volume measure (REFQUALCON 01) (see Part 2). The core definition of SRR at the University of Suffolk follows REF 2029 guidance¹, namely that "contracts with significant responsibility for research are those for whom explicit time and resources are made available to engage actively in independent research, and that is an expectation of the job role". At the University of Suffolk, this translates to a 200-hour annual research allocation (pro-rata).

All staff on the Research and Knowledge Exchange pathway have SRR, but whether their contract contributes to the REF volume measure depends on their RI status (see Part 3).

¹ <https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/section-3-volume-measure-guidance/#section-significant-responsibility-for-research>, 9.

It is well acknowledged that research career pathways can be hard to join, or to rejoin following a career break. For those on the Learning, Teaching and Scholarship pathway who aspire to SRR, we are introducing an allocation of 75 hours per annum for research engagement in 2026, which can be granted with the agreement of the staff member's line manager and School Executive Dean for a maximum of three years. This is intended to support potential progression to the Learning, Teaching and Research pathway, subject to the staff member concerned meeting the criteria for SRR by the end of the three-year period. The 75 hours allocation is subject to review and monitoring as part of the annual appraisal process.

All academic staff also have 18 days paid development time per annum regardless of contract type or level (as set out in our Development Time Policy), with the entitlement reduced on a pro rata basis for part-time contracts.

Expectations in relation to SRR are appropriate and relevant to the University's areas of distinctiveness, academic discipline, career stage and academic pathway (as set out in the promotions criteria). These expectations were developed as part of the Code of Practice consultation with staff between January 2025 and April 2026 and were subject to institutional approval. The expectations are discussed and agreed with line managers and assessed as part of the appraisal process, both at mid-year and end of year appraisals.

Staff with SRR are expected to meet two of the three core expectations:

1. Submit at least one high quality output (rated 2* or above by peer review²) for publication per year. This includes publication in leading peer-reviewed journals; publishing monographs with major publishers; exhibitions; high-level policy contributions; or other relevant research outputs that are eligible for REF submission.
2. Develop and submit at least one external research grant application to an open, competitive funding call relevant to the discipline as Principal or Co-Investigator per year.
3. Be an active and recognised contributor to at least one organisation such as a subject association, learned society or relevant professional body. On an annual basis, such contributions should involve some form of public output or outcome, broadly defined, demonstrating the staff member's research-related impact on their discipline or sphere of research activity at a regional, national or international level.

In addition to the core expectations, staff with SRR are also expected to actively engage in most of the following activities each academic year:

- participate in knowledge exchange activities (development of and contribution to Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, consultancy and contract research)
- collaborate with external non-academic organisations to support the University's civic role within the region and contribute to research impact activities
- undertake PhD supervision at the University of Suffolk and related activity (such as chairing annual progress reviews, vivas and internal examiner roles)
- provide research mentoring or buddying at the University of Suffolk
- actively participate in research development programmes and research seminar series

² As per CoARA guidance <https://www.coara.org> – all outputs are peer reviewed by UoA by two reviewers assigned by UoA leads

- demonstrate esteem factors showing research standing (e.g. PhD external examiner roles; serving as an external panel member for the validation or review of research degree programmes at other institutions; being invited to review grant applications; developing research collaborations with academics in other UK or international institutions).

For staff employed on a part-time basis, all SRR expectations are applied on a pro rata basis, calculated in proportion to their full-time equivalent (FTE) contracted hours. This means that the frequency and volume of expected outputs, grant applications, and broader engagement activities will be scaled accordingly. In practice, this means core expectations remain structured around meeting two of the three criteria, but the timeframe within which each expectation is to be met will be extended proportionately. For example, a member of staff working at 0.5 FTE would be expected to submit a qualifying output or grant application over a two-year rather than one-year cycle. Additional expectations will similarly be assessed in proportion to FTE, with the understanding that part-time staff are expected to engage meaningfully with most of these activities across the academic year, at a level commensurate with their contracted hours.

Our academic pathways are not static, and academic staff can move across pathways at all levels (Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor and Professor) as appropriate to their expertise and experience and relevant for their career ambitions and priorities. This can happen via two mechanisms: a) as part of the annual appraisal process or b) as part of the promotion process. Our HESA codes are reviewed annually to ensure they provide an accurate record of our staff contracts and academic pathway.

Each staff member's responsibilities for teaching and/or research and, where relevant, their achievement of the SRR expectations are considered and discussed between the individual staff member and their line manager at least twice per year as part of the appraisal process. This helps to determine progress against agreed objectives, consider the appropriateness of their current pathway and agree the most appropriate pathway going forward. Any proposed changes to the pathway are subject to agreement with the relevant School Executive Dean or Research Institute Director. This process enhances our research culture and community, supports flexibility and ensures both transparency and equality with workforce roles and responsibilities.

The promotions process provides a clear and transparent mechanism for moving pathways for academic staff at any level, to support the progression and development of our research staff and community. Reflecting our commitment to open research practices as signatories of CoARA, recognition of open research practices is included at each level.

Our CoP supports **the principle of transparency** as it is underpinned by the extensive consultation with staff at all levels to design, develop, draft and finalise the CoP for submission to the funding bodies in May 2026. Staff can access guidance on REF 2029 and the CoP, share their views and contribute to the development of the CoP via several mechanisms, including:

- dedicated REF pages on our staff intranet including information and updates relating to the CoP
- regular reminders and updates shared through the University's staff newsletter and research highlights webpages
- opportunities for new research staff to provide feedback during staff induction meetings led by our Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange

- opportunities for all staff to attend workshops sessions dedicated to reviewing staff roles, promotion criteria, the definition of SRR and our CoP, to share their views and identify key principles to underpin the development of the CoP
- updates, presentations and facilitated discussions at both school/institute and institutional level meetings and at the all-staff annual REF Day
- opportunities for staff to email questions and suggestions directly to the University's REF team
- opportunities for all staff to provide feedback on the draft CoP (made available in accessible formats with appropriate version control), prior to submission to the Executive for approval
- clear communication of any updates made to the draft CoP in response to feedback, via the staff intranet and other relevant communication channels.

Between January 2025 and March 2026, we ran four all staff workshops dedicated to reviewing staff roles, promotion criteria, the definition of SRR and our CoP. During this time, there were three all staff briefings (run in hybrid) led by the Vice Chancellor, and we hosted an online feedback forum and FAQ pages on the staff intranet. As part of our consultation, the CoP and the definition of SRR were included in one-to-one discussions with academic staff on an individual basis as part of their mid-year appraisals.

We posted feedback from the staff workshops on the REF area of the staff intranet. The staff feedback included:

- Staff Contracts and Research Responsibilities – staff appreciated several aspects of our current framework, including the flexibility of academic pathways, the provision of extra Workload Allocation Model (WAM) hours and development days, and the strong support available for Early Career Researchers. However, they also highlighted the need for greater clarity around SRR expectations and the processes for moving between academic pathways, and this feedback has directly informed the development of clearer SRR expectations and enhancements to the promotions process.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) – our staff acknowledged the positive work already happening through support groups, EDI committees, and policies around flexible working and reasonable adjustments. However, they also raised concerns that our staff group is not as diverse as it could be across all grades, and that conducting research may, for example, create barriers for staff with caring responsibilities.
- Development and Support for Research-Active Staff – many staff praised our training programmes highly, reflecting the varied opportunities provided for both staff and postgraduate research students, and praised the collaborative spirit and line manager support that exists in some areas.
- Research Output Diversity and Submissions – some staff identified challenges around research output diversity including gaps in certain UoAs, difficulties in attracting researchers with diverse interests, and weak mechanisms for capturing creative outputs in our current online repository system (OARS). They suggested improving how we showcase diverse outputs through our website and research institutes.
- Output Selection and Former Staff – our staff proposed several inclusive approaches to output selection, including asking everyone to submit samples for review even if not ultimately selected, ensuring representation across themes within each UoA.

We recognise that staff circumstances vary, and we have taken proactive steps to ensure those who may be harder to reach via email and the staff intranet are informed and can ask questions and have their views relating to the CoP heard. For example, managers ensure that the CoP is shared with any of their members of staff who are off long term (sabbatical, secondment or sick leave), as they are in regular contact with these members of staff and have an agreed way of contacting them. All staff on part-time or fixed-term contracts receive the same communications as full-time permanent staff.

Once approved by the funding bodies, our final CoP will be made publicly available on our website in multiple formats to ensure accessibility with standard PDF and HTML web versions, large print and alternative formats available on request, a podcast detailing both our CoP and any updates and a plain English summary document highlighting key points.

The principles of equity and inclusion are embedded throughout our CoP to ensure decisions about submissions are fair, transparent and impartial. We value the diversity of our research community and the breadth of research contributions our staff make, and we are committed to ensuring that no individual or group is unfairly disadvantaged in REF decision-making processes.

We ensure fair and impartial decision-making through a clear process for decisions about staff eligibility, and output selection for submission, made against clearly defined, objective criteria set out in this CoP. All University staff are required to complete and pass mandatory EDI training, renewable every three years. All individuals involved in REF 2029 decision-making will be required to complete additional equality and diversity training, including unconscious bias awareness and specific training on the CoP and the application of the published REF guidance on eligibility, to ensure they understand their responsibilities under equality legislation.

The University recognises its moral and public sector equality duties to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations during this REF selection process. In discharging this duty, the University operates a formal two-stage Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Policy and Procedure which requires that EIAs are embedded in the development of new and revised policies, practices, strategies, and other activities relevant to equality — and not completed retrospectively. The EIA Policy and Procedure require the University to show due regard to the need to: (i) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation; (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and (iii) foster good relations between such groups. All nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are considered within the EIA framework. The process addresses the four Part A requirements set out in the University's EIA Flowchart (Appendix 2 of the EIA Policy): fact finding about the nature and scope of the activity; data collection using existing People and Organisational Development staff records disaggregated by protected characteristic; consideration of who is affected by the activity; and engagement with the extent of involvement of those with protected characteristics in the University community.

We are committed to ensuring that staff with protected characteristics are not disadvantaged nor disproportionately under-represented in selection processes, with EIAs used as a key component of REF decision-making to proactively identify and mitigate the potential risk of negative impacts on specific staff groups.

The University recognises that fixed-term, part-time and contract research staff make a vital and valued contribution to the University's research community. The University is committed to ensuring that these staff are treated equitably throughout the REF 2029 process, and that where they meet the requirements for having SRR and RI, they are considered for inclusion in the REF 2029 submission on the same basis as all other eligible staff. The University ensures that such staff have access to the support and development opportunities available to all research-active staff, including peer review and feedback mechanisms, research development funding, mentoring and career development support (including, where relevant, support in transitioning to more secure employment). We will monitor the treatment of fixed-term, part-time and contract research staff throughout the REF preparation process as part of our programme of EIAs.

We value diverse contributions and recognise that excellent research takes many forms and that researchers make valuable contributions in different ways. Our approach to REF 2029 encourages research outputs across different formats, methodologies, and disciplines and recognises the contribution of researchers at all career stages, including early career researchers. We ensure decisions about output selection are based on quality and alignment with UoA criteria and adopt a panel-based approach to output selection throughout to provide a robust assessment of quality which does not depend on a single individual's assessment. Researchers from under-represented groups are actively supported through mentoring, networking, and development opportunities. Our research leadership reflects the diversity of our research community, and we have a suite of policies and practices supporting EDI including work-life balance and flexible working. We recognise that a truly equitable REF submission is built on a foundation of inclusive research culture, and we are committed to ongoing improvement in this area.

We acknowledge that individual circumstances may affect research productivity without diminishing the quality or value of research produced, and we have established mechanisms through individual conversations with line managers to ensure staff can declare circumstances that may have affected their ability to work productively throughout.

We robustly monitor and address potential bias through EIAs conducted at key decision points (staff eligibility determination, selection for submission, output selection). EIAs are available to all staff and published on staff intranet. Our data, whilst anonymised, is analysed by protected characteristics to identify any patterns of potential disadvantage. We recognise that the relatively small size of our research community, particularly at UoA level, may present challenges in terms of the ability to make effective use of statistical data. In such instances where percentages are unreliable indicators of differential impact, we will focus on instances with a notable impact on specific groups. Should any disparities be identified, we will investigate the causes and take corrective action where necessary via the REF Working Group. The University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee receives regular reports on REF equality monitoring.

1.2 Contextualisation within Institutional Policies

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

As a university, we have purposefully built our research culture in a way that is both incremental and sustainable. EDI is embedded and recognised as part of our ongoing mission and our new institutional strategy which will be launched in 2026. Our approach to REF 2029 and the CoP specifically builds upon our inclusive research environment and our established commitment to EDI, grounded in our institutional values (inclusive, empowering, collaborative, creative, professional and transformative) and structures. Our EDI policy has two parts: the Policy Statement, which sets out the University's principles and commitments, and the Procedural Guidance, which explains how those commitments

are put into practice. As such, our CoP is based on the principles and commitments to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity for all; foster good relations between individuals from different backgrounds; and embed EDI into every aspect of university life. We actively promote equality of access and opportunity and take deliberate steps to prevent and address discrimination in all its forms. We foster a culture where difference is not only respected, but recognised as a source of strength, innovation and insight. This includes visible and non-visible aspects of identity, such as neurodiversity, disability, culture and lived experience. Like our EDI policy, our CoP is guided by the Equality Act 2010, its identified protected characteristics and definitions of unlawful discrimination that are prohibited at the University.

All members of the University have a responsibility to uphold the principles of the EDI policy. Managers and leaders must model inclusive behaviour and ensure their teams do the same. The Executive is accountable for monitoring compliance and progress. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, chaired by the Provost, provides pan-university oversight, monitoring progress against EDI objectives and legal duties, advising on policy and practice, reviewing equality monitoring data and identifying areas for improvement, and ensuring that staff and student voices are reflected in institutional priorities.

Supporting our inclusive approach, we have several active staff networks - including the Anti-Racism Collective, Disability Network, LGBTQIA+ Staff Network, Menopause Network, and Neurodiversity Staff Network. These meet bi-monthly to share experiences and help the University develop its practice and culture. These networks have been consulted in the development of this CoP and will continue to inform our approach to supporting diverse researchers throughout the REF cycle.

The University has a suite of policies and awards supporting EDI. As a Disability Confident Employer, we have taken proactive action to improve how we recruit, retain and develop disabled people, including offering interviews to disabled applicants who meet minimum essential criteria, making reasonable adjustments, and providing occupational health support. This commitment extends to our research community, where we ensure that researchers with disabilities have access to appropriate support and adjustments to enable their full participation in research activities.

Other policies in our organisational context include:

- Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Harassment Policy
- Domestic Abuse Policy
- Relationships at Work Policy
- Equality Impact Policy
- Family friendly policies including maternity leave, paternity leave and adoption leave, time off for dependents and carers leave
- Agile Working Policy
- Flexible Working Policy
- Working From Home Policy
- Trans Equality Policy
- Health and wellbeing policy including adjustments at work, alcohol, drugs and substance misuse, eyecare, menopause guidance, sickness, resilience and stress
- Development Policy
- Staff Study Support Policy
- Freedom of Speech

Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE)

As proud holders of the HR Excellence in Research Award from the European Commission since 2017, we have adopted one of the key principles of the award — that excellent research requires a supportive and inclusive research culture — to underpin our 2023–2030 Research and Knowledge Exchange Excellence Strategy.

This recognises that a proactive and collaborative approach is required between all stakeholders, to create and develop positive strategies, environments and cultures that enable all staff to flourish and achieve their full potential. Our research environment is founded on a culture of integrity, good governance, rewarding best practice and comprehensive support for the development of our researchers and our academic community. Our substantial investment in our professoriate and our research infrastructure underpins our priorities for effectively responding to societal challenges and transforming research to foster a strong, sustainable research culture. We have established a vibrant multi-disciplinary postgraduate research (PGR) community, and we submitted an initial application for Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP) in February 2026.

Our research activity is clustered around our research institutes and our areas of distinctiveness – Digital Futures; Health and Wellbeing; Social Justice and Crime; Sustainability; and Culture and Heritage. Our sustainable and inclusive research strategy and infrastructure support greater numbers of staff submitting external funding bids and increasing applications from a wider range of funders, including major national research funders, and partnering with a wider range of external collaborators.

Responsible Research Assessment

Since REF 2021, the University has continued to develop its approach to responsible research assessment, informed by:

- our successful HR Excellence in Research Award held since 2017, through which we monitor delivery of the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers
- becoming signatories of CoARA and delivering on our action plan
- being active members of the UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN)
- enhanced training and awareness provision for all staff involved in research assessment
- a commitment to transparency in research evaluation processes.

The Code of Practice embeds these key drivers in all assessment decisions to ensure that they are made fairly, transparently and without bias, recognising diverse career paths and research contributions.

The University is an active member of CoARA. Drawing on CoARA's core commitments, our approach to responsible research assessment recognises diverse contributions to our research and we base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation through peer review and do not use inappropriate journal and metric-based evaluation or rankings of research organisations.

We signed the San Francisco Declaration of Research Assessment (DORA) in 2019. As an active member of UKRN, our 2025 work on promotions and training for open research assessment formed a case study featured in the Open and Responsible Researcher Reward and Recognition Project (OR4)³. OR4 is part of the UKRN's Open Research Programme, which aims to accelerate the uptake of open research practices across the UK Higher Education sector. The Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Knowledge Exchange is the institutional lead UKRN representative holding

responsibility for promoting and sustaining open, transparent and rigorous research practice within the University. The role provides strategic oversight of reproducibility activity across the University, ensuring alignment with national UKRN standards and effective liaison with sector partners. This is essential to maintaining a research environment that upholds research integrity, meets external expectations, and demonstrates continuous improvement in research practice.

The University used the Recognising and Rewarding Open Research Toolkit (designed to help with the implementation of effective recognition and reward for open research through researcher assessment practices) to develop more inclusive researcher assessment policies and practices that incentivise, enable and increase the use of open research practices by our researchers. Now a case study for the OR4 project (published on their website) our promotions criteria, revised in 2026, introduced a narrative CV approach and a new career pathway, Research and Impact. Created to reward and recognise both traditional academic outputs and broader societal impact, it includes the generation of new knowledge through rigorous investigation and scholarship, the dissemination of research findings through appropriate academic and public channels and the creation of impact through application of research to benefit society.

Valuing a wider range of contributions, including open research, our revised academic promotion criteria, as part of the UKRN Open OR4, and our action plan as signatories of CoARA, remain central to our inclusive research culture. As a standing agenda item on both the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee and the Research and Enterprise Committee, we are reinforcing our commitment to sustained and strategic development on an ongoing basis in this area. Furthermore, in partnership with the University of Bedfordshire, we have successfully been awarded the EU-supported CoARA Boost Cascade Funding Programme for a project focused on inclusive and open research assessment, and we continue to play an active part in the UK CoARA National Chapter, reinforcing our active engagement in national discussions.

1.3 Actions since REF 2021

The University's EIA for REF 2021

The University submitted a small number of staff (n=15) to REF 2021 in Social Work and Social Policy (UoA 20). Given that we had relatively few CAT A eligible staff (<5 FTE) in other areas, we were successfully granted exemptions in the following UoAs in 2019:

- UoA 2 - Public Health, Health Services and Primary Care (1 FTE)
- UoA 4 - Biological Sciences (4 FTE)
- UoA 11 - Computer Sciences and Informatics (1 FTE)
- UoA 13 - Architecture, Built Environment and Planning (1 FTE)
- UoA 19 - Politics and International Studies (1 FTE)
- UoA 24 - Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism (3 FTE)
- UoA 28 - History (1 FTE)
- UoA 32 - Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory (2 FTE).

6% of academic staff were submitted to REF 2021. Although this was a small submission, it was an accurate reflection of our research profile and stage of maturity on the census date. Whilst the numbers of submitted staff were small, our EDI principles and values underpinned our approach. Inclusivity remains core to the research culture at the University of Suffolk - it is part of who we are. We recognise that a diversity of backgrounds and cultures is key to the success of our research community. We have worked hard to attract both a diverse staff and student body, and we are fully

³ [Case Study Suffolk – Recognising and rewarding open research](#)

committed to providing an environment where everyone is supported to flourish and fulfil their potential, irrespective of their background.

Our action plan from our REF 2021 EIA had four key commitments:

1. To develop a new EDI strategy for the University, refreshing the EDI committee's terms of reference and engagement to be more action orientated and setting up a programme of staff and student engagement across the University.
2. To undertake our first submission for Athena Swan recognition to enable us to consider a number of EDI issues as well as broader intersectional issues.
3. Supported by our HR Excellence in Research Award, to continue to support researchers at all levels and stages in their career, to closely monitor our success on delivering the principles of the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers (Charter and Code). As part of this, to make comparisons in areas such as ethics, training and recruitment and publish an action plan for implementing their strategy to fully adopt the principles of the Charter and Code, with a self-assessment at least every two years to evaluate progress and update our action plan, reported to the Research and Enterprise Committee.
4. To review our training and awareness provision (including mandatory training) to ensure that it is relevant and impactful, as well as our pre and post induction information and engagement.

Underpinned by our institutional strategy, our innovation in building our research culture has been incremental and sustainable. Embedded as one of our six values, we strive for the University to be recognised as an institution with EDI at its core. This is evidenced by our highest scoring areas in our annual staff survey (the things we do best) which relate to inclusion, acceptance of difference and respect. Our progress against our four key commitments from our REF 2021 EIA is outlined below:

1. In 2024-2025, a review of our EDI Committee structure was undertaken leading to a revised formation consisting of a committee and sub-committee. Chaired by the Provost with the Chief People Officer as Deputy Chair, the key responsibilities of the EDI Committee include:
 - pan-University EDI oversight
 - monitoring EDI data
 - reviewing updates and priorities from the Equalities Sub-Committee
 - receiving recommendations relating to any areas of concern or future activity
 - reviewing and allocating funds for EDI activity as recommended by the Equalities Sub-Committee
2. Alongside several EDI initiatives undertaken during 2022/23, we were proud to achieve Athena Swan Bronze accreditation. Our robust resultant action plan ensured momentum has been maintained, and we have made tangible improvements to date.
3. We successfully retained the HR Excellence in Research Award in 2023, which allows us to display the European Commission's 'HR Excellence in Research' badge, signifying our alignment with the [European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct](#) and evidences that we have successfully embedded the principles outlined in the [UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers](#). The international expert peer review team unanimously agreed that the University has demonstrated strong, transparent research culture with forward-thinking and inclusive senior leaders, as well as outstanding progress

embedding the Concordat Principles within its research structures and governance. This award demonstrates our dedication to our researchers and their research endeavours and acknowledges that we completed a gap analysis of our existing policies and practice against the Concordat, developed a robust action plan for implementation, and took into account the views of researchers. We continue to monitor our progress and will be undertaking the nine-year review in 2026. Furthermore, in 2023/24 we identified the actions to driving inclusive recruitment, leading to improved outcomes for candidates and the University, and introduced a new mentoring scheme – Fostering Growth – to support professional growth through meaningful mentor-mentee relationships complementing succession planning, career pathways and career aspirations, enabling staff to thrive.

4. In 2023/24 we delivered enhanced training opportunities, supplementing the mandatory all staff EDI training with the commissioning of bespoke training on 'Supporting EDI Principles' and 'Promoting EDI Principles' from Birketts Solicitors. These sessions covered introducing EDI, recognising negative behaviours and microaggression, and challenging internal biases and supporting those in minority groups. The manager sessions also focussed on key employee lifecycle touchpoints, such as recruitment. Suffolk Family Carers also delivered sessions for line managers around how to support members of their team who have caring responsibilities.

We also launched a new e-learning platform which offers all staff a more accessible way of completing mandatory training and providing a range of continuing professional development (CPD) online courses including equity and inclusion related subjects. Continuing with the success of the sessions from Birketts Solicitors, we increased the number of trained staff and line managers, extending the training to include recognising bias and unacceptable behaviour and socio-economic factors as part of EDI. We also commissioned disability awareness sessions delivered by Enhance the UK, who are a charity run by disabled people offering an insightful perspective around understanding disability in society and at work.

In 2024/25 we introduced a mandatory Sexual Harassment training, reinforcing our commitment to fostering a safe, respectful and inclusive working environment. This plays a vital role in our broader EDI strategy by equipping employees with the knowledge and confidence to identify, challenge and prevent inappropriate behaviours, thereby strengthening our culture of accountability and inclusion. Our membership with Race Equality Matters enabled further new training related to micro-aggressions, with multiple learning opportunities through webinars and initiatives to open conversations around making the University more actively anti-racist.

Since REF 2021, under our revised academic promotion process, in 2022/23 we saw 70% of the total applications being successful, with high success rates from underrepresented groups (67% of those from a Global Majority background; 80% of disabled applicants and 100% of those who were part time). In 2023/24, 68% of all academic promotion applications were successful, 71% of which were from women. This change reflects the effectiveness of our efforts to address gender equity and diversity, providing tangible evidence that our initiatives (as outlined in our Athena Swan action plan) to support female and underrepresented groups' career progression are yielding positive results. The high success rates suggest that the clearer criteria given for each academic pathway and the changes to the process has improved outcomes.

We are also particularly proud of our 2023/24 'People' EDI highlights, which had a very positive impact ensuring good outcomes for our staff. These included a new Supporting Carers policy launched for colleagues who are carers, which set out a range of new initiatives such as five days' paid carers leave per year (an enhancement from the statutory provision of five days unpaid), a

carer's passport and information on linked supporting policies and procedures. We also implemented a new Adjustments at Work procedure which has been designed to empower conversations around reasonable adjustments. Consulted on by the Disability Network, the procedure provides guidance around what a reasonable adjustment is and advises line managers and employees on how to conduct a discussion around adjustments alongside how to implement them.

Part 2: Identifying Staff Contracts with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR)

All our 'teaching and research' (ACEMPFUN 3) contracts in the HESA staff record (i.e. all staff on the Learning, Teaching and Research pathway outlined in section 1.1 above) have significant responsibility for research.

Part 3: Determining Research Independence

3.1 Policies and procedures for determining Research Independence

The approach to identifying Research Independence (RI) for staff on the Research and Knowledge Exchange pathway (i.e. ACEMPFUN 2 contracts) is clear and transparent. All staff in research institutes holding the roles of Research Fellow, Senior Research Fellow, Associate Professor and Professor on this pathway are deemed to be independent researchers. Research Assistants and Research Associates are not normally considered to have RI unless they exceptionally meet any of the following criteria, in accordance with the REF volume measure guidance:

- undertaking self-directed research (rather than primarily carrying out another individual's research programme)
- acting as lead applicant on externally funded research projects or acting as a co-applicant and having significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research
- holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship requiring research independence
- leading a research group or a substantial/specialised work package.

Our approach to identifying RI is consistently applied across all UoAs, and research independence for those on the Research and Knowledge Exchange pathway is considered persistent.

Decision-making on RI for those on the Research and Knowledge Exchange pathway is either undertaken at the recruitment planning stage (i.e. to a post of Research Fellow or above) or through promotion (for example, a Research Associate being promoted to Research Fellow). Staff are notified of this at time of appointment as it is included in their job description or on successful promotion outcome. Data quality relating to RI is assured and any inaccuracies are identified through an annual detailed audit prior to the HESA return, undertaken by the Deputy Director for People and Organisational Development (who is responsible for the HESA data return) with the Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Knowledge Exchange and the Head of Research Degree Awarding Powers and REF.

3.2 Staff, Committees and Training

As noted in section 3.1, decisions on RI are normally undertaken at the recruitment planning stage based on required job role (i.e. Research Fellow, Senior Research Fellow, Associate Professor and

Professor roles all having RI; Research Assistants and Research Associates not having RI). The University's recruitment and selection process is a partnership between the People and Organisational Development (POD) department and the relevant academic school or research directorate. As employers, we have a legal responsibility under the Equality Act 2010, to ensure that no unlawful discrimination takes place in relation to sex, race (includes nationality or citizenship), disability, sexual orientation, gender re-assignment, pregnancy/maternity, marriage/civil partnership, age, religion, or belief and this responsibility is embedded in our CoP. The University has a range of policies guiding fair, legal and consistent employment practices. It is the responsibility of everyone involved in the recruitment process to ensure no applicant receives less favourable treatment than another job applicant on the grounds of a protected characteristic. All staff within the University must complete mandatory training in EDI every three years, and any member of staff chairing an interview panel must have completed Recruitment and Selection Training which includes consideration of EDI and unconscious bias.

3.3 Appeals

There is no appeals process for decisions made by recruitment panels (on appointment).

A Research Assistant or Research Associate may appeal a decision on RI if they believe that their allocation of non-RI is incorrect, that the allocation process was not followed correctly in their case, or that they have experienced inequitable treatment in the allocation decision. This may be the case, for example, where there has been a change to the expectations of the job role through a revision of research responsibilities, progression or promotion. Staff wishing to appeal should discuss the matter with their line manager and submit a written statement to the People and Organisational Development Team setting out the grounds for appeal and why the appellant believes they should have research independence, with any supporting evidence (e.g. successful grant applications, evidence of research leadership and independent research activity, supervisory record). Appeals will be considered by a REF Appeals Panel, comprising:

- Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange (Chair)
- the member of staff's line manager
- a member of the REF Working Group not involved in the original allocation decision
- a member of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee

The panel will aim to reach a decision within 15 working days of receiving the appeal. The appellant will be notified in writing of the outcome, with reasons given. All appeals and outcomes will be recorded by the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate and retained as part of the REF audit trail. The EIA will be updated to reflect any changes to allocations arising from successful appeals. Individual cases will be handled with appropriate confidentiality.

3.4 Equality Impact Assessment

The process for determining Research Independence has been subject to the University's EIA process in full. In accordance with the University's EIA Policy, the first stage of the assessment was an initial screening of the Research Independence determination process to identify any potential negative consequences on protected groups and any opportunities to promote equality proactively. The initial screening was completed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Knowledge Exchange and Head of Research Degree Awarding Powers and REF in conjunction with a trained EIA assessor from our People and Organisational Development (POD) Team.

The University of Suffolk currently has twelve staff on research only contracts, all of whom are deemed to have research independence at research fellow level or above. Applying the Code of

Practice and the definition of research independence set out in the REF2029 guidance makes no change to number of staff with RI. The small size of this pool (n=12) means that disaggregated analysis by protected characteristic is not possible without risking the identification of individuals. In accordance with standard practice for small cohorts, detailed quantitative data by characteristic is therefore not presented in this EIA. The assessment instead focuses on the fairness and consistency of the process by which independent researcher status was determined.

The EIA screening confirms that the process for identifying research independence is robust and that there is no potential for discrimination. Implementation of the Code of Practice and the definition of research independence has no adverse impact on staff with research-only contracts across any protected characteristic, and all opportunities to promote equality have been taken.

The University notes that the size of the research-only staff population reflects the institution's scale and stage of development as a research-active university. The profile of this group is expected to grow in future REF cycles as the University's research capacity continues to develop. We will continue to monitor any changes to this as we progress towards the REF 2029 submission.

Part 4: Allocating Contracts to UoAs

4.1 Policies and Procedures

The University recognises the need to ensure that eligible contracts are allocated to UoAs where there is a clear association with the REF UoA descriptor, based on staff research interests, outputs, grant activity and disciplinary expertise. The small size of the University's research community, the relatively broad disciplinary range, and the commitment to supporting multi-disciplinary research means that it is sometimes necessary to aggregate staff under UoAs that do not perfectly align with their primary discipline area. This enables us to form stronger, viable UoAs for REF submission purposes and to ensure an inclusive approach that recognises the research contributions of as many staff with SRR as possible. The process for aligning staff contracts to UoAs does, however, strive to ensure that there is sufficient meaningful alignment with the unit descriptor to ensure a fair and representative approach.

Our process for allocating staff contracts to UoA

1. A verified staff list is generated by the Deputy Director of People and Organisational Development annually detailing academic staff employed, including contract type, SRR and RI status, FTE and employment start date. This captures any changes made as part of the appraisal or promotions process. This list is shared with the PVC Research and Knowledge Exchange, Head of Research Degree Awarding Powers and REF and the two Associate Deans.
2. The PVC Research and Knowledge Exchange, Head of RDAP and REF and the Associate Deans draft initial UoA allocations based on alignment of staff research interests, outputs, grant activity, and disciplinary expertise with REF UoA descriptors. Where staff work across disciplines, the primary UoA is identified based on the majority of their research activity. The Head of Research Degree Awarding Powers and REF shares the draft allocation with the Deputy Director of People and Organisational Development.

3. We have strategically aligned our areas of distinctiveness with UoAs. Currently we have very few staff whose research interests fall outside our areas of distinctiveness, and we will apply for UoA exemptions as required in line with REF guidance.
4. Draft allocations are then shared with UoA Leads for review. UoA Leads confirm or propose any amendments, identifying any staff whose work more appropriately sits within a different UoA. All proposed changes must be documented with clear rationale.
5. Staff are notified of their proposed UoA allocation and given the opportunity to raise queries or request a review. This step ensures transparency and supports the principles of EDI embedded in the Code of Practice.
6. The Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate conducts an EIA supported by the Data and Process Transformation Officer (POD) on the draft allocations to identify potential patterns of differential impact across different groups - for example, gender or part-time staff. The data is anonymised, but concerns can be raised with the REF Working Group for consideration before allocations are finalised.
7. Final allocations are presented to the REF Working Group for approval. The Working Group confirms that the process has been followed consistently and that allocations reflect the Code of Practice.
8. Confirmed allocations are communicated to all eligible staff in writing with details of the appeals process should they disagree with the UoA allocation.
9. A live register of staff allocations is maintained by the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate and People and Organisational Development for the purposes of facilitating HESA returns. Any changes arising from new appointments, contract changes, or staff departures are reviewed and updated on a rolling basis, with material changes reported to the REF Working Group and People and Organisational Development team.
10. Staff who wish to contest their allocation may do so. All appeals are considered by the REF Working Group and decided in line with the principles of fairness and transparency.

We have a clear strategy for communication and support. Information about the UoA allocation process is communicated through the REF 2029 sections of the staff intranet, direct emails to all eligible staff, presentations at School and Research Institute meetings, our annual REF Day and one-to-one meetings on request. Staff requiring additional support to engage with the allocation process (for example, due to disability, language needs, or absence from work) can contact their line manager to arrange appropriate adjustments in line with our Adjustments at Work Procedure.

Once aligned with a UoA, staff are invited to be actively involved in the development and progression of the submission. Staff are invited to attend UoA meetings, providing an opportunity to contribute to collective discussions about the shape and direction of the submission. They are invited to participate in peer review of outputs (with appropriate training provided), supporting the quality assurance process and helping to ensure that the work being considered for submission meets the standards required for REF 2029. In addition, aligned staff will have the opportunity to contribute to the development of the UoA's statement on Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE), helping to articulate the context, culture and achievements of their disciplinary community. This active involvement reflects the University's commitment to an inclusive, transparent, and collaborative approach to REF preparation.

4.2 Staff, Committees and Training

Our process ensures that all staff with SRR are correctly allocated to the most appropriate REF UoA in line with the University's Code of Practice, the published REF 2029 guidance, and principles of transparency and equity.

Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
PVC Research & Knowledge Exchange	Overall accountability for REF submission and UoA alignment
REF Working Group	Oversight, decision-making and quality assurance
UoA Leads	Reviewing and confirming staff allocation within their UoA
Deputy Director People and Organisational Development	Providing verified employment data and contract information
Head of Research Degree Awarding Powers and REF	Coordinating the process and maintaining records

Training

All staff involved in allocating staff contracts to UoAs have had training in REF policies and procedures and the UoA descriptors. They have also completed training on the criteria and evidence to be used, EDI considerations, unconscious bias awareness, understanding EIAs and the importance of consistency and transparency. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion forms part of the mandatory staff training requirement and is renewable every three years.

4.3 Equality Impact Assessment

The allocation of eligible staff contracts to UoAs may potentially have consequences for individual members of staff, for example in terms of how their work is contextualised within the overall REF 2029 submission or whether their research profile is adequately represented in the possible pool of outputs. The University is committed to ensuring that these decisions are made on the basis of disciplinary fit and research quality alone, and that no member of staff is advantaged or disadvantaged in the allocation process on the basis of a protected characteristic, contract type, working pattern or career stage.

The University of Suffolk is satisfied that the provisional allocation of staff to UoAs has been undertaken through a consistent, transparent, and documented process, applying objective criteria based on conversations with staff, research activity and disciplinary fit. No evidence of discrimination has been found. No changes to the Code of Practice or the UoA allocation process are required as a result of the EIA. The University will monitor the profile of staff across UoAs as REF 2029 preparations continue and will revisit this assessment if the composition of the eligible pool changes materially.

We maintain accurate and up-to-date staff data, ensuring that the University has comprehensive records of all evidence considered in allocation decisions, including the rationale, the UoA alignment

detailed on the costing forms submitted by staff, notes from consultation meetings, any appeals and their outcomes, and equality monitoring data.

Part 5: Selecting outputs

5.1 Policies and Procedures

Overseen by the REF Working Group, the University's strategic approach for selecting outputs is to ensure we evidence and maximise the quality of our output submission, whilst ensuring it is an accurate representation of our research activity. Our established peer-review process, which includes moderation and EIAs, supports our approach in identifying high quality outputs in each UoA and ensures that the final selection accurately represents the diversity of outputs produced in the UoA. Our process is overseen and supported by the REF Working Group.

The output review process at the University has been ongoing since 2022, underpinned by approved guidance on the review process to ensure consistency of approach across UoAs. Established by the REF Working Group, and supported by the Head of Research Degree Awarding Powers and REF, UoA Leads are responsible for identifying and collating eligible outputs and managing the output review process. Progress and outcomes of the reviews are reported on a quarterly basis to the REF Working Group.

Each UoA is establishing a pool of trained internal and external reviewers (including visiting professors and independent reviewers), ensuring good coverage of disciplines, topics, methodologies and expertise within that UoA. There is an expectation that all staff with SRR contribute to output review activity within the UoA associated with their volume-contributing contract. The review process is a valuable experience from a professional development perspective. As such we adopt a purposefully inclusive approach to support REF preparations, ensuring a distributed workload and strengthening understanding of REF assessment criteria for staff at all levels including Early Career Researchers (ECRs).

Each output is assigned by the UoA Lead(s) to at least two anonymous reviewers from the staff or external reviewer pool. We recognise that although assessment criteria are provided, the review process can be subjective and therefore we have incorporated mechanisms to facilitate calibration of scoring within the UoA. This includes the mentoring of less experienced reviewers by more experienced members of the review team; review workshops involving both experienced and new reviewers to ensure consistent application of criteria and the avoidance of bias (e.g. through collectively reviewing, discussing and scoring a small number of outputs to generate shared understanding of the criteria); and sample moderation by external reviewers.

Outputs in languages other than English, including in British Sign Language (BSL), are considered on an equitable basis. The University will refer such work to specialist external advisers where staff within the internal and external reviewer pool are unable to assess the output in the language in which it is submitted for review.

All reviewers receive training on REF criteria, UoA descriptors and categories for outputs scored on a five-point scale, ranging from four star through to unclassified. For internal review purposes, it is recommended to additionally use high / medium / low ratings within each star banding, via a 13-point scale, to enable a more granular level of assessment which can be collated and calibrated numerically.

If there is a significant discrepancy in the reviewer's scores, a third reviewer - often an external reviewer is used. Between 40 - 60% of all outputs are sent to an external reviewer to review for moderation purposes and quality assurance. The UoA Lead(s) then determine the final rating from the scores provided by the reviewers and collate the anonymised feedback based on the ratings and associated justifications from each reviewer.

We have clear protocols on the use of data and confidentiality. Conflicts of interest must be declared, to avoid reviewers considering the work of someone they line manage or have a close personal relationship with. Reviewers remain anonymous to the output author, with the author receiving their final rating and collated anonymised qualitative feedback via the UoA Lead(s). UoA Leads ensure that assessment ratings for individual outputs are stored in a confidential area and only used by UoA Leads and the REF Working Group for research assessment purposes and the identification of outputs for potential submission to REF 2029. Data is both aggregated and anonymised when UoA summaries are circulated more widely. Ratings are not intended to be used to inform performance or promotion processes, other than ensuring that staff meet the University's definition and expectations for SRR (see 1.1 above). Authors may, however, present their own scores where relevant to support annual appraisal or promotion applications.

Identifying substantive link to outputs

Staff with SRR are invited to identify outputs eligible for submission to REF and send them to the UoA Lead(s) on publication. The University has published a flowchart (Appendix 2) to help staff determine whether an output is eligible for REF submission, which is available on the staff intranet. Given the relatively small size of our staff community with SRR, the REF Working Group has up-to-date knowledge of which staff outputs have a substantive link (using the REF guidance), supplemented by People and Organisational Development data on staff employment start and end dates. UoA Leads are responsible for ensuring that each output meets the REF 2029 criteria before it enters the review process.

The University is committed to ensuring that substantive links are identified through a fair, transparent and consistent process and that only research outputs enabled and supported by the institution are eligible for submission. We apply consistent criteria across all staff and outputs in all UoAs and promote equality, diversity and inclusion in our output selection to provide appropriate recognition for the research enabled by the University. Furthermore, we are consistent and conscientious in robust documentation for our decision making and selection process.

In line with REF guidance⁴, outputs authored by individuals while on an excluded contract may be eligible for submission if the individual subsequently moved to a Learning, Teaching and Research or Research and Knowledge Exchange contract with SRR during the REF period, if the contracts were both held at the University of Suffolk and meet the definition of continuous employment (as defined by Section 210 of the Employment Rights Act 1996), and all other eligibility criteria for an eligible employment relationship are met within the REF period (1 January 2021 to 31 December 2028).

Furthermore, for an output to be eligible, the role descriptor of the staff member authoring the output must include an explicit expectation of research activity (as distinct from scholarship) within their role. Research activity is not restricted by profession, as an eligible employment relationship may be with any staff member who undertakes, enables or supports research.

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

For the University of Suffolk, this includes:

- academic staff on teaching and research contracts (ACEMPFUN 3)
- academic staff on research-only contracts (ACEMPFUN 2) who meet the definition of research independence
- Professional Services and technical staff whose contracts explicitly include research activity expectations.
- any other staff, for example, Executive Dean, Pro Vice-Chancellor or other senior leader where the job description and role explicitly include research activity.

An eligible employment relationship must be current at the point at which the submitted output was first made publicly available (an output may first be made publicly available at any point during the eligible employment relationship), or before the submitted output was first made publicly available, when the research resulting in the output was carried out and was enabled and supported by the University (within the time limited period outlined in the REF guidance).

We have defined the indicators that may be requested to evidence a substantive link which include (although may not be limited to): evidence of internal research support (for example, funding for research materials and/or fieldwork, access to institutional research infrastructure - technical or research support including ethical scrutiny and guidance, conference attendance), evidence of work in progress presentations (internally and externally), and evidence of an externally funded grant to support a relevant program of research.

Selecting outputs where the substantive link is via former staff

Substantive links via former staff are considered at a number of points during the review process. Initially before the review process begins the UoA Leads check any output submitted for review has been authored by a member of staff with a current substantive link or if via former staff that the output meets the agreed criteria for eligibility. If it does not, then it is excluded from the review process. Any outputs solely authored by staff made redundant during the REF period will not be eligible for submission. As such we have excluded all outputs from staff who left the University following compulsory redundancy, no matter when the output was published. Where outputs were co-authored by a former staff member who was made redundant and at least one other staff member who remains in the University's employment by the REF deadline, then the output will still be considered eligible for submission.

Outputs from staff who have been selected for voluntary redundancy or severance, have retired or have left after the expiry of a fixed-term contract will be considered individually by the REF Working Group and a decision made based on evidence collated on whether a) they held eligible employment of at least 0.2 FTE for a minimum of 12 months to demonstrate a substantive link and b) the University of Suffolk enabled and demonstrably supported the research leading to the output, which must have been first made publicly available during the output eligibility period. Staff who are leaving by their own choice are asked as part of their exit interview with the Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange about potential outputs eligible for submission and if they are planning to publish outputs supported by the University in the next year.

The REF Working Group review the output pool for each UoA on a quarterly basis to check whether any outputs previously reviewed and selected for potential submission are no longer eligible (for example because of compulsory redundancy). Final eligibility checks will also be undertaken before final submission.

Each output is considered individually in relation to the eligibility criteria and it is not assumed that every output from a former member of staff will be eligible for submission.

Assigning outputs to UoAs

The University of Suffolk is committed to ensuring that research outputs are assigned to UoAs in a manner that is fair, transparent, and designed to showcase the quality of our research in the most appropriate disciplinary context. This process recognises that REF 2029 builds on the decoupling of outputs from individuals, fundamentally separating the contracts used to calculate the volume measure from the specific outputs included in a submission. Our process acknowledges that outputs do not need to be returned to the UoA that is associated with the author's contract of employment and registered HESA category thereby allowing greater flexibility in allocating outputs. Output assignment decisions are made based on disciplinary fit, not on the characteristics of the author, their contract type, or their HESA category. All decisions are made transparently with appropriate consultation and oversight. The University recognises that co-authored outputs may legitimately be submitted by different institutions to different UoAs.

The review process managed locally by UoA Leads ensures a regular cycle of review as new outputs are published. The review process focuses on outputs deemed eligible for REF submission. Our process assesses the level at which outputs are likely to be rated, informs the selection of a representative range of high-quality outputs for submission and ascertains the suitability of the output meeting the UoA descriptor and criteria. Review outcomes can also be used to inform the suitability of the output for another UoA. We have published an output eligibility flowchart on the staff intranet to provide further guidance on eligible outputs. Our process acknowledges that outputs can be included in a UoA submission where the author sits within a different UoA. If as part of the review process (outlined above) identifies that the output may also meet the descriptors for another UoA, the output is sent to the UoA Lead(s) for consideration in that UoA process also. Following the completion of both UoA reviews, the feedback and scores would be discussed by the REF Working Group to consider whether the output meaningfully aligns with the disciplinary areas defined in the UoA descriptor and decide the UoA(s) for consideration in the final submission.

We follow the principle that REF 2029 encourages the submission of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary outputs, with UoA descriptors anticipated to be sufficiently broad to allow interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary outputs to be meaningfully aligned with appropriate disciplinary areas. The University of Suffolk recognises and actively values interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research that crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries.

An output may be considered interdisciplinary if it:

- draws substantially on methodologies, theoretical frameworks, or bodies of knowledge from multiple disciplines
- addresses research questions that span traditional disciplinary boundaries
- makes contributions to knowledge in more than one disciplinary area
- is published in venues that serve interdisciplinary audiences
- has been cited or recognised across multiple disciplinary communities.

We ensure that interdisciplinary outputs are recognised as valuable contributions to knowledge, assigned to UoA(s) where they will be most appropriately and advantageously assessed, and not disadvantaged in the assessment process due to their interdisciplinary nature.

In summary, the UoA allocation steps are outlined below:

- Staff are asked to submit any outputs to our Open Access Repository System (OARS) in accordance with the timelines outlined in the REF Open Access Policy. OARS data is regularly shared with UoA Leads to help with identification of new eligible outputs for review.
- To further support output identification and declaration (especially for non-traditional outputs that do not fall within the scope of the REF Open Access Policy), all staff with SRR are invited to share their research outputs with the UoA Leads via a shared UoA dedicated repository. Our inclusive approach enables staff with SRR to self-select the UoA(s) they consider most suitable for their output and to submit them to the UoA lead for consideration.
- Outputs are logged by the UoA and shared centrally with the Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Knowledge Exchange and the Head of Research Degree Awarding Powers and REF. The metadata associated with the output is recorded including date of publication, journal/publisher, co-authors, and any interdisciplinary indicators.
- An initial UoA suitability assessment is undertaken by the UoA Lead(s) to review the declared output to identify the suitability of the UoA(s) to which it has been submitted and could potentially be allocated, based on subject matter, journal field classification, and published REF panel descriptors.
- Where an output is in a language other than English (including BSL) and there is not capacity within the University to assess it, the output is referred to a specialist external adviser to provide guidance on suitable UoA allocation.
- Where an output has clear disciplinary alignment with a single UoA, it is provisionally assigned to that UoA.
- Where an output is interdisciplinary, or spans more than one UoA, it is flagged for further review at the REF Working Group.
- For interdisciplinary or cross-UoA outputs, the REF Working Group (consisting of all UoA leads) determines the most appropriate UoA, prioritising the UoA where the output is most likely to be assessed at its highest quality.
- Before allocations are confirmed, the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate in collaboration with the People and Organisational Development team carries out an EIA to ensure that the process has not inadvertently disadvantaged any group of staff, type of research method or output. This includes analysis by protected characteristic, contract type, career stage, and working pattern. Should any patterns of concern be noted, these are reported to the REF Working Group and addressed before allocations are finalised.
- With clear criteria for multiple submission, an output will only be submitted to multiple UoAs where the output meaningfully aligns with the disciplinary descriptors of each UoA to which it is submitted, the output makes substantive contributions to knowledge that can be independently recognised and valued by each sub-panel and each UoA can evaluate distinct aspects of the research based on their disciplinary expertise.
- All staff will be informed of the proposed allocation of their output(s) in writing, with a clear rationale provided when we have finalised our proposed selection of outputs.
- Final output allocations are approved by the REF Working Group and signed off by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange and recorded in the University's submission management system and subject to a final consistency and compliance check against REF 2029 eligibility rules.

- A summary of the allocation process and equity review findings is retained and made available as part of the University's Code of Practice compliance record.

Supporting diversity of outputs

Procedures for supporting diversity of outputs apply to all research outputs that meet the REF 2029 eligibility criteria (as defined in REF guidance). As the funding bodies welcome the submission of a very wide range of output types that are consistent with discipline-specific and interdisciplinary approaches to scholarly communication, we have communicated to staff that they can submit a wide range of output types for review for potential REF submission, including but not limited to:

- Journal articles and conference proceedings
- Books, book chapters, and monographs
- Creative and practice-based outputs (performances, exhibitions, compositions, designs)
- Datasets, software, and digital outputs
- Reports, working papers, and policy documents
- Patents and other forms of intellectual property
- Any other output type accepted by REF panels

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

The University is committed to ensuring that its REF 2029 submission accurately and fairly reflects the breadth and quality of research undertaken within each UoA during the assessment period. This section sets out the procedures through which representativeness is assured, from the identification of eligible staff and outputs through to final submission.

The foundation of a representative submission is the systematic identification and capture of all outputs produced by eligible staff across the full REF period and building a comprehensive outputs pool. The UoA Leads work with aligned staff to ensure that outputs are recorded accurately and in a timely manner and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate help maintain and develop an accurate record of this and ensure compliance for open access in line with REF guidance⁵. Output identification will not be limited to those works considered most likely for inclusion; the full range of eligible outputs produced across the UoA are recorded and kept under review throughout the preparation period.

In developing the output pool for each UoA, UoA leads will actively consider the diversity and range of research being captured, with reference to:

- Research themes, questions, and methodologies represented within the unit
- Output type, where disciplinary norms support a variety of forms
- The diversity of topics, philosophical approaches and collaborations

This approach guards against the unconscious narrowing of the pool toward particular types of work or particular groups of researchers and supports the University's broader commitment to an equitable and inclusive research culture.

Our process of peer review also helps ensure the representativeness of the research undertaken for the REF period. All outputs under consideration for submission will be subject to internal peer review by appropriately qualified colleagues within or connected to the UoA. As outlined above, peer review

⁵ <https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/ref-2029-open-access-policy/>

assesses outputs against REF quality criteria and also considers the extent to which the emerging selection is collectively representative of the unit's research activity. Where internal expertise is limited, external reviewers are engaged. Peer review panels are constituted with regard to diversity and balance, and all review activity will be documented.

Aligned staff are kept informed of the outputs attributed to them under consideration for the submission and will be invited to draw attention to any outputs that may not yet have been captured. Staff will be advised of decisions regarding the final inclusion or exclusion of their outputs, and the reasons for those decisions, in accordance with the University's commitment to openness and transparency throughout the REF process.

The representativeness of each UoA submission will be kept under active review throughout the REF preparation period. The REF Working Group provide governance and oversight and periodically consider whether the outputs selected genuinely reflect the breadth of research activity across the unit during the assessment period, and report on this to the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee and EDI Committee. Any significant changes to the composition of the submission will be subject to appropriate governance approval and a review of EIA findings. Where the submitted outputs do not fully demonstrate the diversity of research activity undertaken within the UoA, this will be explained in the unit level statement of representation.

Policies and procedures and responsible research assessment practice

Our policies and procedures, used to encourage and recognise diverse research outputs, reflect our commitment to responsible research assessment as signatories of CoARA. The University of Suffolk is committed to the responsible and equitable assessment of research outputs in line with the principles set out in DORA, CoARA and UKRI/REF guidance. Our CoP sets out our policies and procedures governing the identification, selection, and assessment of outputs for REF 2029.

As outlined in section 1.2, we are committed to open research assessment, and we recognise the diverse outputs, practices, and activities that maximise the quality and impact of research. Outputs are selected through a transparent, documented process. Selection prioritises quality as evidenced by peer review and scholarly or professional significance, not by journal ranking, impact factor or publication venue alone. The use of bibliometric indicators (such as citation counts or journal impact factors) as proxies for quality is explicitly excluded from our review and selection process.

All outputs submitted will comply with REF 2029 open access requirements, where applicable. The University's Research Repository and Open Access Compliance Manager within Library and Learning Services supports staff in achieving compliance. Output selection processes will be subject to EIAs and we actively monitor selection decisions by protected characteristics to identify and address any differential impact. No staff member will be disadvantaged in the selection process due to circumstances related to protected characteristics, periods of leave, or part-time working. All staff will be treated equitably in output selection. Evidence of research independence (such as principal investigator status or grant-holding) will be documented and assessed consistently.

Staff may raise concerns about output selection decisions through the University's REF appeals process, as set out in section 3.3 of the Code of Practice. All concerns will be considered by the REF Working Group, with escalation to the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Exchange or Provost where required.

The REF Working Group holds institutional responsibility for overseeing output policies and procedures. Progress against these policies will be reported regularly to Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee and, where appropriate, to Senate.

5.2 Staff, Committees and Training

Our processes ensure that outputs are allocated to the most appropriate REF UoA and selected for submission in line with the University's Code of Practice, the published REF 2029 guidance, and principles of transparency and equity.

Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
PVC Research & Knowledge Exchange	Overall accountability for REF submission and output allocation/selection
REF Working Group	Oversight, decision-making and quality assurance
UoA Leads	Coordinating output reviews to inform output allocation/selection
Deputy Director People and Organisational Development	Providing verified employment data and contract information
Head of Research Degree Awarding Powers and REF	Coordinating the process and maintaining records

Training

Training is provided for all staff involved in internal peer review of research outputs, to ensure a sound understanding of UoA descriptors, assessment criteria, EDI considerations and unconscious bias awareness.

All staff involved in allocating outputs to UoAs and selecting outputs for submission have had training in REF policies and procedures and the UoA descriptors. They have also completed training on the criteria and evidence to be used, EDI considerations, unconscious bias awareness, understanding EIAs and the importance of consistency and transparency. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion forms part of the mandatory staff training requirement and is renewable every three years.

5.3 Equality Impact Assessment

The purpose of the EIA at the output selection stage is to identify whether the process of selecting outputs for submission has a differential impact on staff with protected characteristics, to ensure that no individual or group is disadvantaged by the way in which selection decisions are made and that the submissions are representative of the research undertaken with the submitting unit during the REF period. This EIA is distinct from, and complementary to, the EIAs undertaken on staff alignment.

An EIA will be conducted at the output selection stage to enable the University to identify whether the outputs being put forward systematically under-represent the work of particular groups of staff, and to consider and document any corrective action taken before the submission is finalised. The EIA will be reviewed by the REF Working Group and reported to the EDI Committee.

The EIA will consider the following protected characteristics, in line with the Equality Act 2010 and REF 2029 guidance:

- Sex / gender
- Ethnicity
- Disability
- Age
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity

In addition, the University will consider the potential impact on staff in relation to:

- Contract type (e.g. fixed-term, part-time)
- Career stage, including Early Career Researchers
- Those who have taken periods of leave or have other individual circumstances recognised under the REF 2029 framework

Working with People and Organisational Development (POD) team, the Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate will prepare an anonymised dataset drawing on POD records and the output pool.

This will include:

- The number and type of outputs in the pool attributed to each member of aligned staff
- The protected characteristic data of aligned staff, held by POD and shared in accordance with data protection requirements
- Any individual circumstances disclosed by staff that are relevant to their output profile (e.g. periods of maternity leave, ill health, or part-time working)
- Where data is incomplete or where sample sizes within particular groups are too small to draw meaningful conclusions, this will be noted and appropriate caution applied in interpreting findings.

Analytical framework for the EIA will examine whether there are statistically meaningful differences between groups of staff in relation to:

- the number of outputs per person in the pool
- the types of outputs represented (e.g. monographs, journal articles, practice-based outputs)
- the star ratings assigned through internal peer review
- the proportion of outputs selected for submission relative to the pool
- the proportion of staff whose outputs are represented in the final submission

Comparisons will be made across protected characteristic groups, and any patterns of potential disadvantage — for example, if outputs produced by staff from particular groups are disproportionately rated lower or less frequently selected — will be examined carefully and documented.

The findings of the EIA will be reviewed by the REF Working Group, which will consider whether any differential impact identified is a function of the selection process itself, or reflects wider structural inequalities in research output production that the University needs to address through other means. It will also determine whether any adjustments to the selection process or criteria are warranted and if any individual circumstances have been appropriately taken into account in selection decisions.

Any mitigating action taken will be documented and the EIA findings and any resulting actions will be reported to the EDI Committee and retained as part of the University's REF audit trail.

A summary of the EIA findings — appropriately anonymised to protect individual privacy — will be made available to staff. Staff who believe that their outputs have been unfairly assessed or excluded from submission may raise a concern through the appeals procedure set out in Section 3.3 of this Code of Practice.

The EIA will be undertaken at the following key stages of output selection:

Stage	EIA Activity
Initial output pool review	Baseline analysis of pool composition by protected characteristic, output type and methodological approach
Following internal peer review	Analysis of peer review ratings by protected characteristic, output type and methodological approach
Draft output selection	Analysis of selected outputs against pool by protected characteristic, output type and methodological approach
Final submission	Confirmation EIA, documenting any residual differential impact and rationale

All EIA activity will be fully documented, including the data used, the analysis undertaken, the findings, any decisions made in response, and the rationale for those decisions. All EIAs undertaken at the University of Suffolk are posted on the Hub. This documentation will be retained and made available to the REF team on request.

Part 6: Appendices

1. REF Working Group membership and terms of reference 2025-26
2. REF output eligibility flowchart
3. Equality Impact Assessment initial screening form

University of Suffolk
REF WORKING GROUP
Membership and Terms of Reference 2025-26

Purpose

The overarching role of the REF Working Group is to strategically lead, oversee and coordinate the University's preparations for REF 2029.

Terms of Reference

1. To lead and oversee the University's preparations and submission to REF 2029, reporting on progress and areas of potential risk to the Research and Enterprise Committee and Senate.
2. To keep abreast of REF guidance, making recommendations on areas of strategic importance to the Research and Enterprise Committee.
3. To oversee the production of institutional level elements of the REF 2029 submission, including the REF Code of Practice and the institutional level Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE) statement.
4. To oversee preparations for REF 2029 in Units of Assessment (UoAs), including in relation to:
 - a. staff contracts contributing to the volume measure
 - b. the review of outputs for potential submission and allocation to relevant UoAs
 - c. the development of impact case studies
 - d. preparation and approval of SPRE statements at unit level.
5. To make decisions regarding the following:
 - a. UoAs to be submitted to REF 2029
 - b. the allocation of staff contracts to UoAs
 - c. the selection of outputs for submission within each UoA
 - d. the selection of impact case studies for submission within each UoA.
6. To ensure that all REF decision-making is conducted in accordance with the approved REF Code of Practice and informed by Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs), in order to meet the University's obligations under the Equality Act 2010.
7. To ensure effective communication and engagement with staff and other relevant stakeholders regarding REF 2029 preparations.

Membership

Ex officio

- Pro-Vice Chancellor Research and Knowledge Exchange (Chair)
- Head of Research Degree Awarding Powers and REF (Deputy Chair)
- Unit of Assessment Leads (9)
- Associate Director, Research and Knowledge Exchange (Funding and Contracts)
- Head of Research Culture and Knowledge Exchange
- Senior Lecturer, Learning and Teaching Enhancement
- Independent External Advisor
- Culture, Organisational Development and Workforce Transformation Business Partner, People and Organisational Development
- Data and Processes Officer, People and Organisational Development

Total membership: 17

Secretary

Research Institute Coordinator

Notes on membership

1. The working group may call upon individuals with particular experience or expertise to be in attendance or present on particular items.
2. Observers may attend meetings of the REF Working Group at the discretion and by invitation of the Chair.
3. Substitutions for members unable to attend a meeting must be agreed beforehand with the Chair.

Quorum

50% of members

Frequency of meetings

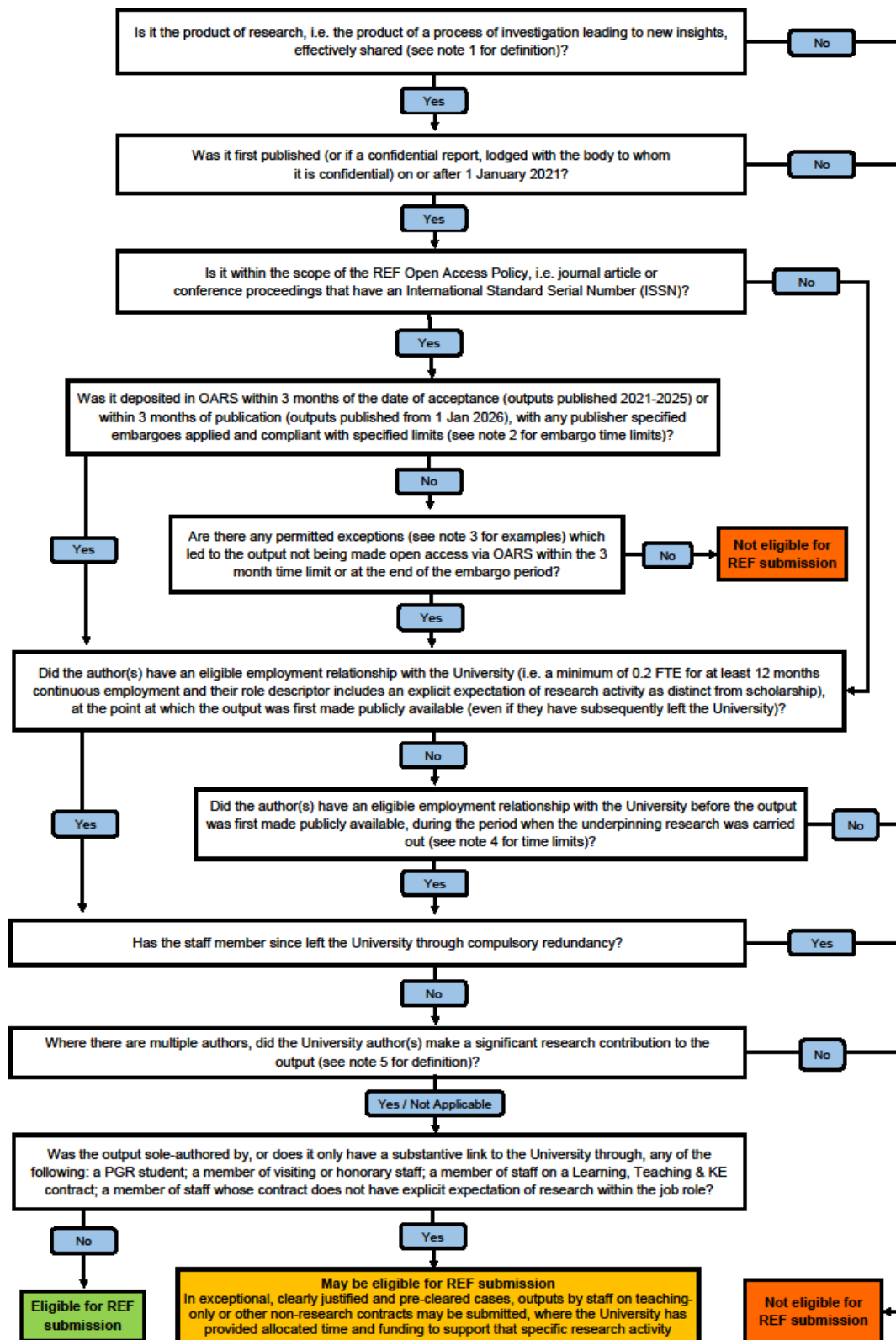
Three times per year, or more frequently as required in the build up to the submission deadline

Reports to

Research and Enterprise Committee

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee as required

Flowchart: Is an output eligible for REF submission?



Flowchart notes

Note 1: Definition of research

Research is defined as a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared.

This includes:

- work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, culture, society, and/or to the public and voluntary sectors
- scholarship, which is defined for the REF as the creation, development and maintenance of the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines, in forms such as dictionaries, scholarly editions, catalogues and contributions to major research databases
- the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights
- the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction.

Effectively shared includes research that is published, disseminated or made publicly available in the form of assessable research outputs, and confidential reports.

The definition of research excludes:

- the routine testing and routine analysis of materials, components and processes such as for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques
- the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research
- editorships of journals and other activities associated with the dissemination of research findings

Diverse outputs

Research involves a diverse set of research practices, which lead to a wide range of diverse outputs. Such outputs may include innovative formats, accessible reporting formats, and modes of expression that may depart from historical conventions within specific fields and contexts.

Examples of diverse output types include, but go well beyond, journal articles, conference papers, monographs and book chapters, to include, as appropriate to each UoA:

- non-textual (artefacts, audio, visual, multi-modal)
- creative, performance and practice-led outputs
- reviews and research synthesis
- software and code
- datasets
- translations and critical editions
- reagents
- multi-component outputs
- policy summaries and analyses
- different types of reports

An underpinning principle of the REF is that all forms of research output and research practice will be assessed on a fair and equal basis. Sub-panels will not regard any particular form of output as of greater or lesser quality than another per se, and all subject matter will be assessed equally, without bias.

Note 2: Maximum embargo periods for open access

Maximum embargo periods for REF eligibility vary by date of publication and REF panel.

For publications between 2021–2025, the embargo period should not exceed 12 months for outputs falling under Panels A and B (incorporating UoAs 3 and 11) and 24 months for Panels C and D (incorporating UoAs 14, 20 and 34). For publications from January 2026, the embargo period should not exceed 6 months for Panels A and B and 12 months for Panels C and D.

Note 3: Permitted exceptions for open access

Permitted exceptions to open access requirements include:

- it being unlawful to deposit the output or to otherwise make it available
- the publication actively disallows open access deposit, or the publication requires a longer embargo period that exceeds the maximum (see note 2 above), but it was the most appropriate publication for the output
- there was a delay in securing the final peer-reviewed text for deposit (e.g. where a paper has multiple authors)
- third party content was included for which licences could not be obtained at a reasonable cost
- it was published after the author left the University and it has not been possible to determine compliance with open access criteria
- criteria beyond the control of the University (including but not limited to personal circumstances of the author, industrial action, closure days and software issues) prevented compliance with open access requirements.

Note 4: Time limits for eligible employment relationship prior to publication

Where the author(s) were not employed by the University at the point of publication but had an eligible employment relationship with the University before the output was first made publicly available, during the period when the underpinning research was carried out, the output may still be eligible for submission, subject to the following time limits prior to the date of the output first being made publicly available:

- 2 years for the majority of outputs
- 5 years for long-form and extended process outputs (where this exception is requested, a 100-word justification of long-form / extended process designation will be required and assessed by panels).

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, involve intense activity, sustained over a period of time, usually of 5 years or longer.

Note 5: Demonstrating a significant research contribution (SRC) where there are multiple authors

The approach to demonstrating a SRC is expected to broadly align with the REF 2021 approach, and will be determined via panel guidance (yet to be published). For most REF 2021 panels, no additional information was required about the author's contribution where there were 15 authors or fewer. Where there were more authors, indicators of SRC included substantial contribution either to the conception and design of the study, or to the organisation of the conduct of the study, or to carrying out the study, or to analysis and interpretation of study data and help with drafting the output, or critique of the output for important intellectual content. Several panels specified that the SRC may be subject to audit.

Further guidance and support

Guidance material

Introduction to open access

<https://libguides.uos.ac.uk/open-access-oars/introduction>

REF and the Open Access policy

<https://libguides.uos.ac.uk/open-access-oars/ref>

Open Access Repository Suffolk (OARS)

<https://libguides.uos.ac.uk/open-access-oars/oars>

REF 2029 Guidance on Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU)

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

REF 2029 Open Access policy

<https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/ref-2029-open-access-policy/>

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT – Initial Screening Form

Please complete this form in conjunction with the [Initial Screening Guidance Notes](#)

Directorate:	Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate
Activity: policy/procedure, strategy, function, proposal, project, service, or programme title*: <i>*Please note these will all be denoted as 'activity' for rest of the guidance.</i>	Introduction of the REF 2029 Code of Practice (CoP) and implementation of the definition of Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) outlined in the CoP. Please see REF 2029 Code of Practice guidance for further background information.
Name and role of the manager completing this assessment:	Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Knowledge Exchange Head of RDAP and REF
Name and role of counter checker of assessment:	Deputy Director, People and Organisational Development (POD)
Name(s) of any other people who need to be involved and consulted within this initial assessment (e.g., decision makers, frontline staff, relevant groups and stakeholders):	REF Working Group Data and Process Transformation Officer, POD
Date of assessment:	29 April 2026

Part A: i) Fact Finding

1.	What are the aims of the activity? How does this relate to equality?	A Code of Practice (CoP) is a requirement for REF 2029. It sets a minimum standard for participation. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) wishing to make a submission to the exercise must have a CoP approved by the funding bodies. The REF 2029 CoP are a set of guidelines and procedures that HEIs must develop and implement. The CoP outlines how HEIs will make key decisions about their submission to the exercise. These decisions concern identifying contracts that contribute to the REF volume measure, allocating contracts to Units of Assessment (UoAs) and selecting research outputs for submission to the REF. The CoP and SRR determination process aims to: Identify, fairly and transparently, which staff contracts meet the definition of SRR and Research Independence (RI) for REF 2029 purposes and
----	---	---

		therefore contribute to the University's REF volume measure. • Ensure that the staff identified reliably reflect genuine research responsibilities and are correctly mapped to HESA academic employment function codes. • Establish a clear, consistent basis for UoA allocation and output selection. • Uphold the University's obligations under the Equality Act 2010, the REF 2029 Code of Practice, and its commitments as a Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) and San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) signatory. The activity is directly relevant to equality because it involves decisions about which staff are included in the REF 2029 submission, with implications for workload allocation and career pathway alignment.
2.	How will these aims be achieved?	<u>Fair and Transparent Identification of Staff with SRR</u> SRR determination is achieved through the University's academic pathway model, an updated version of which will be introduced with effect from 1 August 2026. The three pathways – Learning, Teaching and Scholarship (LTS); Learning, Teaching and Research (LTR); and Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE) – were developed in consultation with staff and trade unions. Staff on both the LTR and RKE pathways are identified as having SRR. All staff on the LTR pathway are deemed to have research independence; staff on the RKE pathway are deemed to be independent researchers if they meet the criteria specified in the University's CoP. The SRR determination process operates as follows: • HR data drawn from the HESA staff record is used to identify all academic staff employed on a contract that includes research as a substantive element (LTR and RKE pathways under HESA academic employment function codes 1 and 2). • Each member of staff is reviewed against published SRR criteria by their line manager as part of the annual appraisal process, in consultation with the relevant Executive Dean and the Head of RDAP and

	REF, to ensure that they continue to be on the correct academic pathway. Clear processes have also been established for UoA allocation and output selection, as outlined in the CoP, to ensure fair and transparent decision-making that does not disadvantage staff with protected characteristics. Transparency is maintained through extensive staff consultation and publication of the SRR criteria, the Code of Practice (including this EIA) and dedicated REF pages on the Hub (the staff intranet). The criteria are applied consistently across both academic schools. <u>Fair and Transparent Identification of Staff with Research Independence</u> The approach to identifying Research Independence (RI) for staff on the Research and Knowledge Exchange pathway (i.e. ACEMPFUN 2 contracts) is clear and transparent. Decisions on RI are normally undertaken at the recruitment planning stage based on required job role. All staff holding the roles of Research Fellow, Senior Research Fellow, Associate Professor and Professor on this RKE pathway are deemed to be independent researchers. Research Assistants and Research Associates are not normally considered to have RI unless they exceptionally meet any of the following criteria, in accordance with the REF volume measure guidance: • undertaking self-directed research (rather than primarily carrying out another individual's research programme) • acting as lead applicant on externally funded research projects or acting as a co-applicant and having significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research • holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship requiring research independence • leading a research group or a substantial / specialised work package. Our approach to identifying RI is consistently applied across all UoAs, and research independence for those on the Research and Knowledge Exchange pathway is considered persistent.
--	---

REF Code of Practice
Version 1.1 (August 2026)
Owner: Research and Knowledge Exchange Directorate

	functions. As such, they must comply with these statutory requirements. HEIs are required to submit their CoP for approval by the funding bodies to ref29copsubmissions@sfc.ac.uk between 11 May and 15 May 2026. The CoP will be presented to the Executive Committee on 12 May for final approval prior to submission.
--	---

Part A: ii) Data Collection and Analysis

6. What evidence is already available which will help in the development of both the activity and the EIA? Identify any existing baseline data or gaps in data available in assessing the potential impact of this activity in relation to equality groups and their wellbeing (e.g., monitoring data, student/staff surveys, enquiry records, complaints, comments, research, outcomes of reviews, inspections, audits, feedback from previous consultations, known inequalities). This can also include involvement and consultation in the scoping stages of the activity. Consider what this highlight in the activity's development? It should not be necessary to conduct additional research at the screening stage. However, where gaps in evidence are significant, the EIA procedure should be paused to address them. How might any gaps in data identified be fulfilled?	The development of the CoP and the EIA has been informed by extensive consultation in the scoping stages, with two all staff workshops held on 29 September 2025; pages on the Hub for staff summarising staff feedback; consultation and publication of the SRR definition; and the open consultation on the CoP. Staff networks (including the Anti-Racism Collective, Disability Network, LGBTQIA+ Staff Network and Neurodiversity Staff Network) were invited to provide feedback on the draft CoP. POD data on staff profiles by academic pathway has informed the development of the CoP and the initial EIA. EIAs will continue to be used at key decision points (e.g. staff eligibility determination, selection for submission, output selection) in the build up to the final submission in 2028, to proactively identify and mitigate the potential risk of negative impacts on specific staff groups. The REF Working Group and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee will receive regular REF equality monitoring reports based on EIA findings. For example, data on research engagement from the Research and Knowledge Exchange Office (RKEO) (development and submission of externally funded research bids and grants; publication data on research outputs) has been used to provisionally identify whether staff currently with SRR would meet the new definition and expectations for SRR. This data has been shared with the Data and Process Transformation Officer, POD to analyse in terms of demographic data. This has provided reassurance that there are not any staff groups with protected characteristics who are anticipated to be adversely affected by the implementation of the CoP and the new SRR definition and expectations.
---	---

		We recognise that the relatively small size of our research community, particularly at UoA level, may present challenges in terms of the ability to make effective use of statistical data. In such instances where percentages are unreliable indicators of differential impact, we will focus on instances with a notable impact on specific groups.
--	--	--

Part B:

Impact on students, staff, and the wider community

Relevance:			Potential Impact:	Analysis:
Does the activity affect people because of? -			If yes, is the potential impact: 1) Positive; 2) Negative. (consequences /Inequalities or Indirect); or 3) No impact	Outline the reason including any evidence to support the impact assessment. How might we reduce any adverse impacts identified? What action is being taken?
7.	Disability	Y	Positive impact	The CoP has been designed to ensure fair and impartial decision-making, through clear processes for decisions about staff eligibility, UoA allocation and output selection, made against clearly defined, objective criteria set out in the CoP. All staff within the University must complete mandatory EDI training every three years. All individuals involved in REF 2029 decision-making will also be required to complete additional equality and diversity training, including unconscious bias awareness and specific training on the CoP, to ensure they understand their responsibilities under equality legislation. Where REF eligibility is determined at the recruitment stage via specified job roles that require research independence, any member of staff chairing an interview panel must have completed Recruitment and Selection Training which also includes consideration of EDI and unconscious bias. Researchers from under-represented groups are actively supported through
	Gender identity and expression	N	No impact	
	Race/ethnic origin	N	No impact	
	Religion/Belief	N	No impact	
	Sexual Orientation	N	No impact	
	Age	N	No impact	
	Marriage and civil partnership	N	No impact	
	Pregnancy and Maternity (employment only)	Y	Positive impact	
	Contract type	N	No impact	
	Other population groups e.g., carers, ex-offenders		n/a	
	Wider determinants (Socio-economic and environmental level) e.g., access to adequate		n/a	

	income, good food, housing, education			mentoring, networking, and development opportunities. There is a suite of University policies and practices supporting EDI including work-life balance and flexible working. We acknowledge that individual circumstances may affect research productivity without diminishing the quality or value of research produced. Support mechanisms exist for staff to declare personal circumstances that may have affected their ability to work productively throughout (e.g. pregnancy, periods of maternity leave, ill health, part-time working). The University will adopt a flexible approach to assessing achievement of SRR expectations for any staff members who declare such circumstances. SRR status will not be removed from any staff member for not meeting SRR expectations where they are pregnant or on a period of approved leave during the relevant appraisal year (e.g. due to maternity leave or ill health). As a Disability Confident Employer, the University has taken proactive action to improve how we recruit, retain and develop disabled people, including offering interviews to disabled applicants who meet minimum essential criteria, making reasonable adjustments, and providing occupational health support. This commitment extends to our research community, where we ensure that researchers with disabilities have access to appropriate support and adjustments to enable their full participation in research activities. Consulted on by the Disability Network, the University's Adjustments at Work procedure has been designed to empower conversations around reasonable adjustments, providing guidance around what a reasonable adjustment is, how to conduct a discussion around adjustments and how to implement them. The University recognises that fixed-term, part-time and contract research staff make
--	---------------------------------------	--	--	---

			a vital and valued contribution to the University's research community. The University is committed to ensuring that these staff are treated equitably throughout the REF 2029 process, and that where they meet the requirements for having SRR and RI, they are considered for inclusion in the REF 2029 submission on the same basis as all other eligible staff. The University ensures that such staff have access to the support and development opportunities available to all research-active staff, including peer review and feedback mechanisms, research development funding, mentoring and career development support (including, where relevant, support in transitioning to more secure employment). SRR expectations for part-time staff are commensurate with their pro rata research time allocation, and this is taken into consideration during appraisal discussions. The new route to SRR for those on the Learning, Teaching and Scholarship pathway is well suited to supporting the needs of those staff still building their research portfolio (e.g. Early Career Researchers). This will enable realistic expectations to be set regarding research activity that are reflective of career stage, with a view to building to full SRR status over a three-year period with appropriate developmental support. In relation to output selection, the adoption of a panel-based approach to decision-making will provide a robust assessment of quality which does not depend on a single individual's assessment. The CoP outlines our commitment to open research assessment and our recognition of diverse outputs, practices and activities that maximise the quality and impact of research. The CoP welcomes outputs across different formats, methodologies and disciplines. Outputs will be selected through a transparent, documented process. Selection prioritises quality as evidenced by
--	--	--	---

			peer review and scholarly or professional significance, not by journal ranking, impact factor or publication venue alone. The use of bibliometric indicators (such as citation counts or journal impact factors) as proxies for quality is explicitly excluded from our review and selection process. We will ensure that there are clear and accessible appeals processes in place for any staff who have concerns about REF decision making. This includes any concerns that processes have not been correctly followed or that staff have experienced inequitable treatment. Appeals will be considered by a REF Appeals Panel (where they relate to staff eligibility) or by the REF Working Group (where they relate to output selection), with appropriate training (including EDI considerations) provided for staff members involved in considering appeals.
	Will the activity have an impact on the following:	Y/ N	
	People's autonomy, such as job control, flexibility, job security?	N	No impact All three academic pathways are equally valued within the University, with promotions criteria supporting career progression within all pathways. The pathways are designed to be flexible, allowing staff to move between pathways. For those on the Learning, Teaching and Scholarship pathway aspiring to SRR, the new 75-hour research time allocation facilitates staff moving to the Learning, Teaching and Research pathway over a three-year period.
	Social connections: How do the decisions to be made affect social relationships, support, networks?	N	No impact There is no impact on social relationships. Support networks and development opportunities will continue to be available for staff on all academic pathways and all academic staff have 18 days for development.

	Extent of people's involvement and providing opportunities to influence decision making?	N	No impact	There has been extensive consultation on the SRR definition and expectations, CoP and promotions criteria. Both the SRR definition/expectations and CoP were published on the Hub for all staff consultation prior to being approved. This consultation process has included: • two all staff workshops held on 29 September 2025; pages on the Hub with staff summarising staff feedback; consultation and publication of the SRR definition and the open consultation on the CoP. • first draft of CoP reviewed by the REF Working Group (21 March – 4 April 2026) • second draft of CoP reviewed by both Executive Deans and Provost (9 April – 17 April 2026) • third draft of CoP available to all staff for review (20 April – 1 May 2026) • final draft Executive Committee review and approval 12 May 2026 We recognise that staff circumstances vary, and we have taken proactive steps to ensure those who may be harder to reach via email and the staff intranet are informed and can ask questions and have their views relating to the CoP heard. For example, managers were asked to ensure that the draft CoP was shared with any of their members of staff who were off long term (sabbatical, secondment or sick leave) via their agreed way of contacting them. All staff on part-time or fixed-term contracts received the same communications as full-time permanent staff.
--	--	---	-----------	---

Part C: Opportunities for positive promotion/action

8.	<i>What steps have been taken to positively promote equality?</i> As set out in the CoP, the following steps positively promote equality: • All staff at the University complete mandatory EDI training every three years, with additional training required for anyone involved in REF decision-making, including unconscious bias awareness and CoP-specific guidance. • Decisions on staff eligibility and output selection are made against clearly defined, objective criteria, with a panel-based approach to avoid over-reliance on any single individual's judgement. • Part-time staff and those on fixed-term contracts are subject to equal treatment, with access to peer review, research development funding, mentoring, and career development support on the same basis as all other eligible staff. SRR expectations for part-time staff are commensurate with their pro rata research time allocation to ensure an equitable approach. • The CoP welcomes outputs across different formats, methodologies and disciplines, and recognises researchers at all career stages, including Early Career Researchers (ECRs). • Support mechanisms exist for staff to declare personal circumstances that may have affected productivity, ensuring these are taken into account sensitively. • EIAs conducted at key decision points, data is analysed by protected characteristics, EIA findings are published on the staff intranet, and the REF Working Group and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee receives regular REF equality monitoring reports. • Our inclusive research culture ensures that researchers from under-represented groups are actively supported through mentoring, networking and development opportunities, underpinned by a suite of policies on flexible working and work-life balance.
-----------	--

Part D: Outcomes

Tick which one applies:

9.	1. Activity not relevant to equality and/or wellbeing for the reasons set out in the 'notes' section below	2. Satisfactory - no action required. No major change. The EIA screening demonstrates that the policy is robust and that the evidence shows no potential for discrimination and that all opportunities to promote equality have been taken (optional add any notes below)	3. Adjust the activity to remove barriers, better promote equality, or improve inclusivity of this activity (detail actions below)	4. Stop and remove the activity – if the activity shows actual or potential unlawful discrimination it must be stopped and removed or changed
	☐	☒	☐	☐



Notes (add detail here)	Move to Stage 2 to undertake a full impact assessment
-------------------------	---

10.	How will the impact of this activity be monitored?	Further EIAs will be undertaken as the CoP is implemented and via regular reports to the REF Working Group and EDI Committee.
11.	When do you plan to revisit this assessment?	To be reviewed after the completion of the 2026 appraisal round and then on an annual basis thereafter.

We are satisfied that an initial screening has been carried out and a full impact assessment is not required.

Assessor: Head of RDAP and REF	Moderator: PVC Research and Knowledge Exchange
Signed:	Signed:
Date: 07/05/2026	Date: 07/05/2026

Thank you for completing this assessment. Please retain a copy for your records and upload the form to the [central repository](#) and fill out the [completion log](#).

Version Control

Version Number	Reason	Moderated by	Moderated date