

Code of Practice template

Institution name: The University of Edinburgh

Date of submission: May 2026

Part 1: Introduction

1. The Research Excellence Framework 2029 (hereafter referred to as REF 2029) is the system for assessing the quality of research in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK. The purpose of the exercise is to assess the quality of UK research and inform the selective allocation of research grants to HEIs by the four UK higher education funding bodies.
2. The University of Edinburgh supports the principles set out by the national funding bodies as underpinning the exercise, and is committed to abiding by these principles across all aspects of decision-making in REF 2029, including areas outwith those required to be detailed in this document by the funding bodies, such as impact case study selection.
3. These principles are:

Robustness

All decisions relating to staff contracts contributing to the volume measure will be evidence-based and a record of the decision-making will be stored. Decisions made at a School/Institute/Unit of Assessment (UoA) level will be verified by College teams. Governance of the policies and procedures in this document and throughout the exercise will be the responsibility of our REF Board.

HESA annual returns ensure robustness through both a provided data validation tool and HESA's issue management system. Annual governance processes include verification of data by our HR and Governance and Strategic Planning departments, before the submission is signed off by the Principal.

Transparency

All processes for determining which contracts qualify to contribute to REF volume measure will be available in accessible formats and publicised to all academic and other relevant staff across the University. This information will be made available on the University SharePoint and drawn to the attention of staff. Once confirmed, the Code of Practice will be published on the Research England REF and University websites, supported by a clear programme of communication to explain the decision-making process.

The communications strategy for this Code of Practice, and decisions relating to REF 2029 in the University of Edinburgh includes communications to members of staff who might be affected by the REF decisions detailed in this document, and who are not working on campus e.g. who have taken family-related leave. For members of staff not working on campus at the time of publication a version of this document will be posted to them.

All documents and material referenced in this document have a weblink to further information available in the Appendices available at the end of this document.

Equity and Inclusion

The University is committed to ensuring that its REF 2029 decision-making processes are consistent across the University, and that disciplinary differences and cultures are respected while also crafting one coherent code of practice. The Equality Impact Assessments associated with this Code of Practice,

and our REF 2029 preparations assess the policies and procedures we have designed, but also consider the “myths” surrounding REF decision-making and whether there are indirect effects to protected groups, to improve confidence in our decision-making. The processes defined in this document, and decisions regarding whether a contract qualifies to contribute to REF volume measure, are only relevant in the context of REF 2029. These decisions will not impact on an individual’s employment status, promotions, pay or condition of service.

In addition to REF 2029’s principles, this Code aligns with our commitments in our University People Strategy, and as a signatory of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment.

The University of Edinburgh has an ongoing commitment to embed Equality and Diversity across all its work, including research. Our EDI policies are inclusive, supporting our fixed-term and part-time staff, including contract research staff. Our Equality Outcomes 2025-2029 document sets out our EDI priorities, and these outcomes will form part of a bold EDI Strategy, with the University Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee taking responsibility for its development, monitoring and review on behalf of the University Executive. Our 2025 Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Progress Report provides a comprehensive review of the progress we have made in advancing EDI against the four Equality Outcomes 2021-2025.

The University is a proud holder of an Advance HE Athena Swan Institutional Silver award, the first University in Scotland to hold this level of award, which recognises our work to address gender equality in higher education. We are committed members of the Advance HE Race Equality Charter, and we have an ambitious action plan to progress race equality and anti-racism throughout our institution. We are also recognised as a Stonewall Proud Employer member and a Carer Positive Employer, and have many active equality-related staff/student networks and committees.

Contextualisation within Institutional Policies

4. REF 2029 is governed by principles of responsible research assessment. The University of Edinburgh embraces these principles and in doing so we strive to build research cultures which support inclusion, celebrate difference, challenge prejudice and ensure fairness. We aim to create a university community in which all individuals are able to develop to their full potential so that they can contribute to the success of the University as a world-leading centre of academic excellence. Our staff and students are our greatest assets, and we are committed to ensuring that all members of the University community are able to excel, and to be respected and valued for their unique perspectives and contributions. It is recognised that individuals contribute to the goals of the University in different ways at different stages in their career and not all academic staff are eligible to be included in the REF 2029 submissions. In a change from previous Research Excellence Framework submissions, no persons are submitted to the exercise and instead the underpinning people aspect of REF 2029 is based on the HESA staff returns.

5. However, following on from similar principles established in the REF 2021 Code of Practice, the University commits that:

Contributions to REF 2029 in the form of outputs, impacts or other submittable material are for the purposes of REF 2029 only. Neither contribution nor non-contribution of such materials to REF will be considered in any decision about an individual's career trajectory at the University.

“Significant Responsibility for Research” and “Research Independence” are decisions made about contracts related to fields submitted in the annual Higher Education Statistics Agency

(HESA) staff return, which underpin the REF 2029 submission. No decision about an individual's career trajectory at the University of Edinburgh will be taken on the basis of the categorisations of contracts within these fields.

6. The principles outlined in this Code echo the values of the University of Edinburgh Strategy 2030. These values include committed to being:

- a welcoming community;
- diverse, inclusive and accessible;
- a place of transformation and of self-improvement;
- ambitious, bold and acting with integrity;
- principled, considerate and respectful.

7. In addition to being a member of the UK Reproducibility Network, and committed to the principles of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, the University of Edinburgh is a signatory of and committed to the:

- Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers
- Technician Commitment
- UKRI Statement of Expectations for Doctoral Training
- San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)
- Concordat on Openness on Animal Research in the UK
- NCCPE Manifesto for Public Engagement
- Athena SWAN Charter
- Race Equality Charter
- Stonewall Proud Employers Network
- The Rainbow Enterprise Network
- Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research & Innovation Practice

8. The University will therefore ensure that the criteria, policies and procedures that support the REF 2029 process will be in line with our existing commitments, and align to new commitments when there are opportunities to do so. REF 2029 decision-making and policies will be subject to equality impact assessments (EqIA) to test their fairness.

Update on Actions since REF 2021

9. There have been a number of changes made to REF since REF 2021 and the Future Research Assessment Programme review (2022-23) that followed. In parallel, various new measures have been introduced with the purpose of ensuring improved cultures and environment for research across the University of Edinburgh.

10. Launched in the summer of 2021, the University has a dedicated Research Staff Hub, which collates sources from across the University to support researchers to undertake their role, develop themselves and progress in their chosen career. The hub was created as part of the University's commitment to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and includes resources and support specifically for early career researchers, those on fixed-term contracts, for their career development and management. As detailed in the Concordat action plan, support for those on fixed-term contracts includes improved processes and engagement in redeployment support as part of our strategy to address career sustainability, through the Redeployment Register. Addressing contracts and precarity, there is a dedicated page on the University HR website summarising entitlements such as annual leave, occupational sick pay, parental leave and maternity / paternity leave.

11. In 2022 the University of Edinburgh signed up to the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment. This European initiative with an international span is a collective of organisations committed to reforming the methods and processes by which research, researchers, and research organisations are evaluated. Our CoARA action plan was published in 2025, and is complementary to this document, highlighting our commitments to acknowledging our diversity in research outputs across the University, and our longstanding adherence to responsible use of research metrics.

12. Our first Research Cultures Action Plan (RCAP) was agreed by University Executive in February 2023, with a second phase launched January 2026. This realises our commitment to foster an environment in which research, researchers, and those who support them, can thrive. It has five Underpinning Values (Citizenship, Wellbeing, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), Ethics and Integrity, and Learning) and five Drivers for Change (Career pathways and progression, Targeted support, Responsible research, Communication & engagement, Governance & data). Actions related to the RCAP can be found online, and a link can be found in the appendices of this document.

13. REF 2021 coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, which had profound effects on the UK, the University of Edinburgh as an employer, and individual academics and their ability to conduct research. After the final REF 2021 Equality Impact Assessment was published the University commissioned two pieces of work: "Understanding the medium-term impact of COVID-19 on research careers at the University of Edinburgh"; and "Investigating Gender Disparities in the REF 2021 exercise". Both of these reports articulate how the pandemic exacerbated inequalities for under-represented groups in academia, including time to conduct and publish research. Therefore, the changes in policy in REF 2029 to remove the direct link between individuals conducting research and authored outputs, and removal of the need for circumstances processes, are welcomed.

14. The University has provided guidance for staff in using Generative AI in their work, and that guidance will be complied within the preparations of REF 2029. The University's AI platform, ELM, improves data security and ethics when using AI, reduces cost, and is supported by the University's IT. The University has Responsible AI and AI Safety guidance which provides a practical overview of the ethical issues associated with using generative AI, along with a hands-on guide to common risks and relevant mitigation strategies.

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

Policies and Procedures

15. The REF 2029 guidance states that there are two criteria that will identify whether a contract is eligible for inclusion in the volume measure:

1. significant responsibility for research for 'teaching and research' contracts
2. research independence for 'research only' contracts

Contracts which meet one of these two criteria will be included in the volume measure. Therefore, all members of academic staff will be checked to determine their academic function.

16. All staff contracts within the HESA category of Academic Function 'Teaching and Research' (ACEMPFUN 3) identify staff with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR). Therefore, all the University of Edinburgh's 'teaching and research' (ACEMPFUN 3) contracts qualify to contribute to the REF volume measure.

17. Staff contracts within the HESA category of Academic function 'Research-only' (ACEMPFUN 2) will then be reviewed to determine research independence, and this is covered in Part 3.

Staff, Committees, and Training

Please refer to Part 3

Appeals

18. Members of staff may learn about their HESA staff contract Academic Function (ACEMPFUN), the 'Contract qualifies to contribute to REF volume measure' and 'REF Unit of Assessment' statuses by contacting their College REF teams.

19. To address transparency, work has commenced to make REF-related fields more accessible in the University's HR & finance system, People and Money (P&M), so that any member of academic staff can view the REFQUALCON value associated with their contract(s). Progress on this will be logged in amendments and changes to this Code of Practice over the course of the REF 2029 project, and the logs of changes will be available on our REF 2029 SharePoint page.

20. The College points of contact are:

College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine cmvmref@ed.ac.uk

College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences cahss.ref@ed.ac.uk

College of Science and Engineering CSE.REF@ed.ac.uk

21. This is not a process for contract amendments, however any requests from individual academics for a review of the academic function of their contract since the original assessment should initially go to their most local (School/Institute-based) UoA administrator/manager. Should the individual feel that, after this review, their query remains unresolved, they may appeal through their College Dean of Research who will present a case to the REF Board.

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

Please refer to part 3

Part 3: Determining Research Independence

Policies and Procedures

Criteria and Evidence

22. As a university, it is critical that we both set the highest standards of data quality and are inclusive when determining which contracts are those with independence. This philosophy of excellence and inclusion follows on from our REF 2021 Code of Practice, which was accepted by the Scottish Funding Council.

23. The following criteria will be applied to ascertain research independence for all staff whose contracted academic function is 'research only' (ACEMPFUN 2).

24. If one of the following criteria is met, the research contract is considered to be one of independence and therefore contributes to the volume:

- Principal Investigator (PI) on an external research grant
- Holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship where research independence is a requirement
- Responsible for a distinct body of research on a large external research grant (for example, a Co-Investigator (CoI) and/or work package leader)

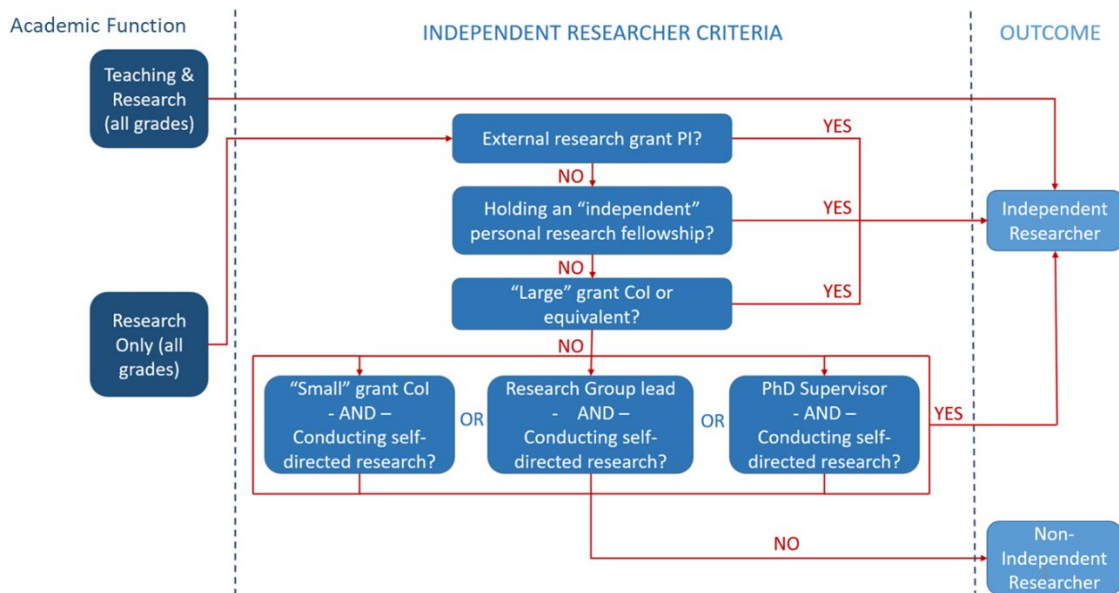
25. If a research contract does not meet the above criteria, but does meet one of the following combinations of criteria, then their contract will be considered to be independent and will contribute to the volume:

- Conducting self-directed research, rather than carrying out another individual's research; AND responsible for a distinct body of research on a smaller external research grant (for example, a CoI)
- Conducting self-directed research, rather than carrying out another individual's research; AND leading a research group.
- Conducting self-directed research, rather than carrying out another individual's research; AND supervisor of a PhD student (within the REF 2029 assessment period).

26. The values of "large" and "smaller" research grant are discipline-specific, and UoA decision-makers must agree on these definitions, which must be used consistently within a UoA.

27. The University provides information on academic specialisation in innovation on the Innovation Careers Hub, including an Innovation Competency Framework. The Innovation pathway is complementary to the research independence criteria here. University Innovation Fellowships are included as "independent" personal research fellowships, and obtaining funding for proof of concepts or translational research would be eligible under "research grants" criteria.

The research independence summary and flowchart presented can be used to help inform decisions.



28. Research independence is determined utilising the decision matrix/flowchart detailed above. The process for research independence determination is an ongoing process in line with the annual HESA reporting.

29. The University's method for identifying staff contracts which meet the definition of an independent researcher has been designed to ensure transparency and consistency in the process across the University's three Colleges. Decisions should be, where possible, based on information available in the University's HR & finance (P&M), research management (Worktribe), and student record (EUCLID) systems, ensuring as objective an approach as possible.

30. The REF guidance states that research independence should be considered persistent, and only in exceptional cases should independence be removed. Therefore, once independence has been determined for an individual contract it will not be re-checked this REF cycle unless new evidence is provided to the UoA decision-makers.

Decision-Making and Communication

31. Decision making regarding staff independence will be done on a quarterly basis and finalised for that year in July of each year that contributes to the average volume measure (2025/26 and 2026/27).

Communication

32. The Code of Practice will be publicised to all academic staff via established communication channels including mailing lists, the University intranet (SharePoint), staff newsletters, School/Department meetings, and Town Hall meetings. The Code of Practice and REF guidance will be available on our dedicated Research Excellence Framework SharePoint and alternative formats of the document will be made available.

33. For members of staff not working on campus at the time of publication e.g. on secondment or family related leave a version will be posted to the contact address listed on P&M. This policy was agreed following evaluation of the draft EqIA on SRR and Research Independence, aka “staff decisions” (as detailed below) by the EDI Review Group. Their recommendation is that within these policies there can be no discrimination, for example, for someone who has been on family related leave and that this should be accounted for in our processes and reflected in our communications.

34. Meetings and events to communicate the Code of Practice will involve a mix of online, in-person and hybrid sessions to ensure maximum visibility across the campuses and Colleges of the University. A sub-titled video recording explaining the decisions articulated in this document will be made available for all staff to ensure that the decision-making process is visible for the remainder of the REF cycle, and to ensure that anyone who joins the University later than the years contributing to the average volume measure (2025/26 and 2026/27) understands how the REF code of practice is/was applied.

35. Evaluation of the draft EqIA on staff decisions (as detailed below) by the EDI Review Group recommended that there is specific responsibility in communications about REF to challenge ongoing misconceptions about the relationship between REF contribution and an individual’s career trajectory. There is a degree of “myth-busting” that needs to be part of ongoing communications related to REF 2029, and this communication section was enhanced to make the articulated separation between institutional REF assessment and individual career trajectories clear. Therefore, every opportunity for communications about the decisions the University of Edinburgh makes in relation to REF 2029, as described in this document, will include explicitly the statement on page 2, that

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Significant Responsibility for Research and Research Independence are decisions made about contracts related to fields submitted in the annual Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) staff return, which underpin the REF 2029 submission. No decision about an individual’s career trajectory at the University of Edinburgh will be taken on the basis of the categorisations of contracts within these fields.

Staff, Committees, and Training

36. The submission will be overseen by the Vice-Principal (Research & Innovation) and will be managed by the Edinburgh Research Office University REF Team, led by the Head of REF, Research Planning and Performance.

37. The University’s Research & Innovation Policy Group is responsible for all matters relating to research, including having oversight of the delivery of external assessments such as REF. Research & Innovation Policy Group reports to the University Executive (UE), and recommended to UE that the University form the REF Board and proposed the membership for the Board.

38. The REF Board will play a key role formulating the University’s REF 2029 submission strategy and policy. It is the main forum for REF discussion and will make the final recommendations to Research &

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Innovation Policy Group, who report to University Executive regarding the University's submission to REF 2029. University Executive will finally approve the REF 2029 submission.

39. The University REF Operations Group (REF Ops), chaired by the Head of REF, Research Planning and Performance, includes representatives from the Colleges, HR, and Library Research Support, and oversees the administrative arrangements for REF 2029. It is an advisory group and provides operational support to members of REF Board in the exercise of their responsibilities.

40. The REF Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Review Group (REF EDI RG) acts to ensure the fairness of the policies and procedures in the REF 2029 exercise at this University. This advisory group contains representatives from all Colleges in both academic and professional services backgrounds. REF EDI RG will possess both the technical expertise to understand EDI data and information for evaluation of policies and processes, and the authority with Units of Assessment to be trusted to effect any change that REF EDI RG deems necessary. Academics will be invited to participate based on the spread of academic backgrounds from Main Panels, to ensure they are able to represent their disciplines effectively. While the REF EDI RG is set up at the request of the REF Board it is also empowered to seek interventions from the Board to address issues.

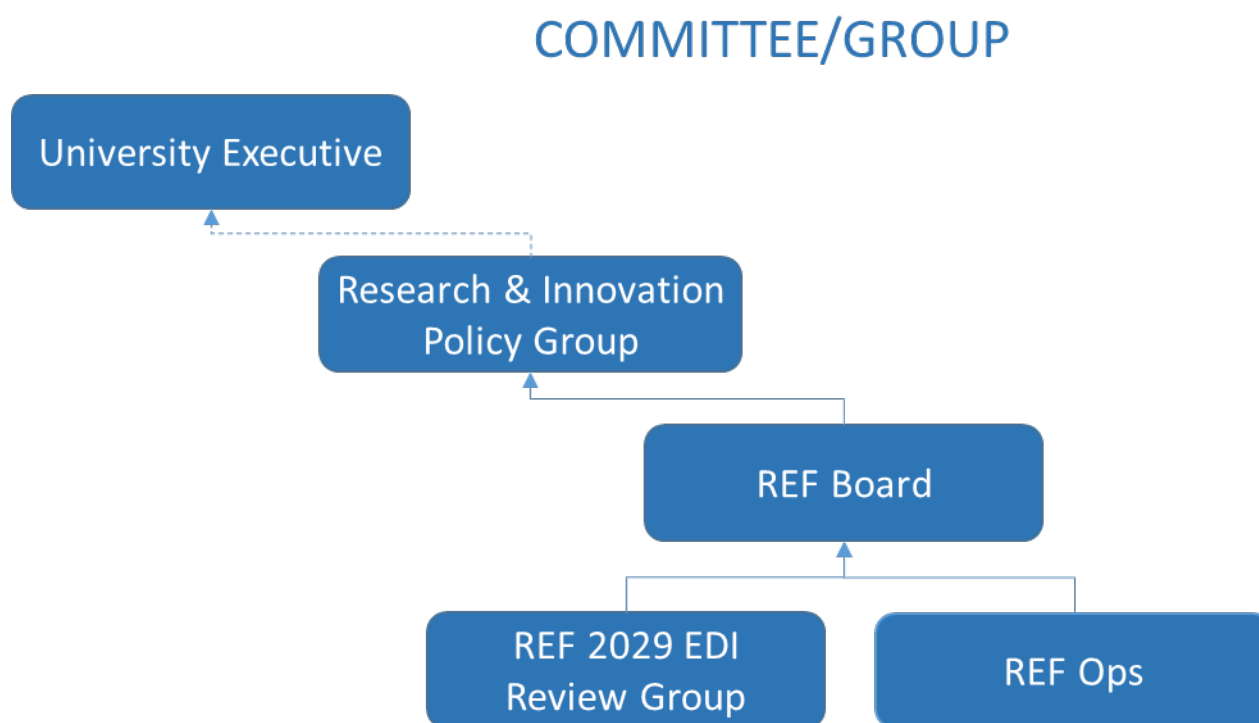


Figure 1: schematic showing the governance groups for research and REF in the University of Edinburgh (University Executive, Research & Innovation Policy Group and REF Board), and the two advisory groups of REF Ops and REF EDI RG. REF Board reports to Research & Innovation Policy Group, who make recommendations to University Executive.

41. Each College and UoA will have named academic and administrative coordinators, who together are responsible for the management and administration of the REF 2029 submission process in their

area. These named points of contacts are the main decision-makers for their disciplinary areas, managed by College Deans of Research and Heads of College Research Offices, who are their direct link to the REF Board. The UoA coordinators will take responsibility for organising UoA focused teams, to ensure representation from across the UoA, and the UoA academic coordinator has responsibility for chairing UoA team meetings, for reporting progress and any issues to College Deans of Research and College research offices. UoA academic and administrative coordinators are responsible for conducting the staff data checking in relation to the REF-relevant HESA fields for their UoAs and conducting the output review processes set out in this document. The UoA academic and administrative coordinators are also responsible for the identification of potential impact case studies, helping to ensure close working between the impact team and academics, and for identifying the lead writers for UoA-level SPRE statements.

42. An EqIA will be undertaken regarding the University's REF 2029 management and decision-making structure to identify any areas of potential discrimination and in response, to maximise opportunities to enhance equality and diversity.

Training

43. Members of University groups, committees and panels, designated officers and staff (both academic and professional services) involved in the compilation of the University's REF 2029 submission will be offered REF-focused development and training opportunities designed to meet their needs with regard to fair decision making and enable them to understand their respective responsibilities in the process. The training is mandatory for individuals involved in any decision-making as follows.

44. **Unconscious Bias training** is required training for all individuals involved in any REF 2029 advisory or decision-making processes, including the determination of independent research in a contract, the selection of outputs and the selection of impact case studies.

- Individuals involved must have completed the University's "Understanding Unconscious Bias" (previously Challenging Unconscious Bias). This is an online course that aims to increase understanding of unconscious bias in the workplace.
- Individuals involved must have completed the University's "Inclusion Essentials at Edinburgh" (previously Equality and Diversity Essentials). This is an online course that provides information about relevant legislation and explains the legal obligations that apply to individuals and organisations.
- Individuals should attend the University's "Understanding Implicit Bias" workshop, as provided by the University Lead for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- Individuals should complete the University's REF 2029 training package, which will be finalised and made available once the guidance from REF is finalised and the Code of Practice is approved. It will be a requirement that all staff involved in any decision-making related to REF 2029 have completed this module.

45. UoA academic coordinators must ensure that any external advisors receive appropriate briefing in the application of the Code of Practice when participating in University processes, relevant to the advice they are providing.

46. Ongoing learning and development during the REF submission process is offered to the College and UoA teams through a variety of methods, primarily through frequent meetings at College and University level to allow for networking and sharing of best practices. Various networks act to streamline support, provide learning and development, and disseminate communications for REF efficiently.

Appeals

Please refer to Part 2 for the appeal process.

47. The process for defining research independence has been designed to ensure a transparent and consistent process that is evidence based. It is hoped that this, in combination with an effective communications plan, will minimise the incidence of any persons being dissatisfied with the ruling regarding their research independence.

48. On that basis, there are only two grounds for appeal:

- Points of error in the databases being checked for evidence of the individual meeting the research independence criteria (*for example, incorrect record of a PhD student's supervisor(s)*)
- The individual's situation has changed since the original assessment, such that, within the eligible two years period, they now meet the criteria (*for example, they have recently secured an externally funded research grant as a PI*).

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

49. The University will conduct equality impact assessments (EqIAs) at critical points over the course of the REF 2029 submission preparation period. EqIAs are part of our statutory duty to assess the equality impact of our applied policies and practices. These will provide thorough and systematic analyses of the research independence and output selection policies to determine whether these may have a differential impact on particular groups. The analyses will cover all eligible staff. The EqIAs for REF 2029 will follow our established University guidance and templates, and anyone writing the EqIA documents will complete the "Introducing Equality Impact Assessments" training available to University members of staff.

50. The EqIAs will analyse data on all the protected characteristics for which sufficient/reliable data are available. The findings from these assessments will be used to inform this Code of Practice to ensure that it is improved and enhanced if required, through the course of the University's preparations for the REF submission.

51. The REF EDI RG will present reports on EqIAs to the relevant University committees (e.g. REF Board, Research & Innovation Policy Group) highlighting areas of potential discrimination and examples of good practice. Where the data highlights potential bias or discrimination, this will be drawn

to the attention of the local areas affected. Good practice will be promoted more widely across other areas of REF work, where these have demonstrated a positive impact on equality and diversity.

52. EqlAs will be undertaken in line with University policies and procedures. The outcome of the University's final REF EqlA will be made openly available along with the actions taken to address any issues that arise.

52. The initial EqlA regarding staff decisions (found in the appendices of this document) for REF 2029 builds on the final EqlA of REF 2021 and uses staff data from the 2024/25 HESA pilot year of reporting REF related fields. The differences between the inclusion of staff in REF 2021 (REF1a) and the initial use of REFQUALCON in 2024/25 indicates increases in the proportion of female academics, and the number of BAME academics as eligible for REF, by the different measures. The REF 2029 requirements of staff contracts qualifying for volume through HESA appear more inclusive than the REF 2021 staff selection, even with similar eligibility criteria applied.

53. The EqlA on staff decisions contributing to the Volume Measure included data on protected characteristics that are included in the HESA Staff return and that have high levels of completion and enables meaningful assessment, i.e. age, sex, and ethnicity. There are significant gaps from self-declarations of other protected characteristics, e.g. religion or belief and sexual orientation, which have over 40% non-disclosure rates and this data has therefore not been included in the assessment due to the limited insight the data provides.

54. While the EqlA outcomes identified these data gaps, they also identified areas of good practice, including the benefits of co-creating policy with subject area experts in REF EDI RG and addressing potential detrimental impacts during early stages of policy and process development (paragraphs 33 and 35). A reflection on the EqlA process is that compliance for the purposes of REF has led to valuable discussions and highlighted the need for wider conversations with the academic body on the importance of EDI data. REF is therefore an impetus for future work on promoting EDI in research and improving academics' knowledge of how their EDI data can be used to inform positive and fair decision-making in the institution.

Part 4: Allocating Contracts to UoAs

Policies and Procedures

55. The REF 2029 guidance states that "Each eligible contract should be linked to the UoA to which it is principally associated. This allocation is to be done using the REFUOA2029 field in the HESA Staff record." All eligible contracts includes contract(s) belonging to an academic staff member whose primary employment function is to undertake either 'teaching and research' (ACEMPFUN 3) and 'research only' (ACEMPFUN 2) activities, as recorded in the HESA Staff record ACEMPFUN field i.e. non-independent research-only contracts will also be assigned a UoA.

56. Contract assignment to UoAs will be based on the recommendation of the UoA coordinators. The University's REF Board will make the final decisions about the UoAs to which the University will submit.

57. In April 2025, REF Board approved the guidance to UoA-decision makers that used the following questions as prompts:

- 1) Has this person been returned to a REF exercise previously as a member of staff?
 - a) If at this Higher Education Institution (HEI), which Unit of Assessment?

- b) If at another HEI, do you know which?
- c) Is the previous Unit of Assessment one that we will make a return to?
- 2) Does the School/Institute that the contract sits in naturally align to a Unit of Assessment e.g. Physics, Veterinary Science?
 - a) Within that School/Institute, does the department they are in naturally align to a Unit of Assessment e.g. History, Philosophy?
- 3) Does the body of work they have produced in the REF cycle (and ideally on their current contract) naturally align to a Unit of Assessment?

58. While outputs have been decoupled from staff, and so outputs do not have to be returned to the UoA that an output's author's contract is principally associated with, the academic's published work may help inform the assignment of their contract to a UoA.

59. This therefore provides a framework for decision-making based on evidence of where the contract is principally associated. Timelines for decision-making will be in line with the staff decision-making articulated in Part 2, and HESA reporting deadlines.

Staff, Committees, and Training

Please refer to Part 3

Equality Impact Assessment

60. An equality impact assessment has been undertaken on this policy and can be found in the appendices. Continuing EqlAs on UoA allocations will be undertaken in line with University policies and procedures, and as described in Part 3, and overseen by the REF EDI Review Group. Should REF EDI RG inform a UoA or REF Board of apparent inconsistencies in the equality data for UoA allocation, the unit decision-makers should be prepared to explain how the decisions were made regarding allocation based on the answers to the questions described here.

61. Evaluation of the initial EqlA for Contract Allocation to Unit of Assessment by EDI Review Group included recommendation that the intersectionality of protected characteristics is specifically considered in the future analyses of the EqlA for this policy.

Part 5: Selecting outputs

Policies and Procedures

62. The main factor that will inform decisions regarding which outputs will be selected for submission to REF 2029 is that of the quality of the research outputs in REF terms, determined by peer review within the UoAs, and coordinated by the UoA coordinator. In addition, the University will need to ensure that the requirements for eligibility by REF (such as substantive link) are adhered to and our submission is compliant.

63. All final output review scores will be recorded in Pure (our Current Research Information System, CRIS), and the output review function in the system will be the primary evidence of output review and

indicative scoring. The UoA outputs for submission will be determined via ranking through a 13-point scale, with that ranking based on peer review, from multiple reviewers (potentially including some reviewers external to the University).

64. Authors have the opportunity to nominate outputs for consideration through the output review process in Pure, but are not obligated to do so. This process will ensure the pool of outputs under consideration includes those produced by active members of staff, and therefore the outputs for selection are representative of the research being undertaken within UoAs. UoA coordinators are able to request reviews of outputs from within Pure. Iterations of review and scoring will be undertaken as needed to ensure that outputs produced close to the submission date are recognised and treated with parity to those from earlier in the eligible period. For selection, the strategy for handling ties on review quality scores is that the outputs should be reflected on in the context of the the SPRE unit statement, and the representativeness of these outputs in light of the articulated subject areas, as described in the narrative element of the submission. UoA coordinators will be able to select outputs for submission from within Pure once the functionality exists.

Identifying substantive link to outputs

65. Eligibility of outputs for submission to REF 2029, due to authors having substantive links to the HEI in the relevant assessment period, will be identified primarily through a matching tool. This tool will verify that staff employment contracts match the research period and the output is therefore eligible. This allows for verification of output eligibility without the UoA decision-makers having to effectively re-couple the output to specific authors, potentially unconsciously affecting the selection process.

66. The matching tool will also account for the output eligibility exclusions detailed in the Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding (section 6.7).

67. Section 6.8 of the Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding describes the possibility of an exceptional circumstance, where outputs may be submitted that are sole-authored by staff on teaching-only, honorary emeritus contracts, or other non-research contracts. These cases will require prior approval from the Research England REF Director. While there is currently insufficient information to understand the scope of use of this exception, the University will ensure that any request for such an exception be evidence-based and used for outputs that were relevant to the statement of representation within the unit level SPRE statement. The exception request would also only be submitted after the approval of REF Board that it was a justifiable case. Updates on designing a consistent approach to this, once the guidance on special requests is published, will be logged in amendments and changes to this Code of Practice over the course of the REF 2029 project, and the logs of changes will be available on our REF 2029 SharePoint page.

68. If staff members are not former, but change contract type from one where research is a responsibility, to one that has no research responsibility (e.g. a teaching-only academic contract), they can still provide a substantive link to an output from the eligible period.

Selecting outputs where the substantive link is via former staff

69. REF guidance requires fair processes and policies for output selection from four categories of staff leavers:

- Compulsory redundancy,
- Voluntary redundancy or severance,
- Retirement,
- Expiration of fixed term contracts

70. We expect the majority of outputs that we return to REF 2029 will be associated with at least one author who is a current member of staff. Where the highest quality of research in REF terms would be illustrated by including outputs associated with former staff with substantive links to the University, we will consider including these on a similar basis as any other eligible output, and these outputs will be subject to the processes outlined in this document.

71. In line with the Contributions to Knowledge & Understanding guidance (6.7.2), “outputs where the substantive link occurred before the submitted output was made publicly available, will not be eligible for submission where the author was subject to compulsory redundancy”. This means that if an author who provides a substantive link has been made compulsorily redundant, and their output is only made publicly available after their departure, then that output is not eligible for submission to REF 2029. This ineligibility will be built into the rules of the matching tool.

72. The University retains the right to communicate with former staff regarding potential contributions of research material to REF 2029.

73. REF Board and REF EDI RG will receive annual reports of the number of outputs where the substantive link is provided by a former member of staff, by the categories of staff leavers.

Assigning outputs to UoAs

74. The University of Edinburgh has a history of supporting and developing ground-breaking interdisciplinary research, and our Research and Innovation strategy articulates our Challenge Areas, that map onto areas of interdisciplinary strength across the University. We anticipate that many of our outputs selected for submission can be considered interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, or transdisciplinary.

75. Outputs assignment to units of assessment will be based on the recommendation of reviewers and confirmed by the UoA coordinators that the outputs fit the discipline description. Interdisciplinary outputs that fit the description of multiple units can be returned to the units in question with the agreement and approval of the relevant UoA coordinators.

76. Outputs that are diverse or non-traditional in nature will be assigned to UoAs based on the discipline of the research conducted, but will be recommended for cross-referral where the medium of the output is relevant to another unit e.g. a musical composition output may be cross-referred to UoA33 but not returned as an output to that unit.

Procedures for supporting a diversity of research outputs

77. In our REF 2021 submission 1.4% of our selected outputs were “non-traditional” e.g. art works, performances, datasets, code, protocols. In advance of REF 2029 guidance, we convened a Diverse Research Outputs Working Group to understand selection processes for non-traditional outputs in REF and produce guidance or supporting material for output reviewers. Our commitment to recognising diverse research outputs is published in our CoARA action plan under “Commitment 1: Recognise the diversity of contributions to, and careers in, research in accordance with the needs and nature of the research”.

78. As it is developed, guidance and training will be provided to reviewers and selectors to recognise the wider contributions to knowledge and understanding, as well as recognising non-journal and non-single author monograph research outputs, and ensure these are valued at parity to more traditional output types. It is therefore intended that our procedures increase awareness of the many varied output types that are produced in the course of research, and to increase the number considered for selection to the REF assessment.

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

79. The UoA coordinators are best placed to understand the breadth and depth of the research portfolio within their area(s), working in conjunction with the School Directors of Research and the College Deans of REF and Research. As submissions are prepared, at review stages the UoA coordinators will be asked by REF Board for contextual information on how they have assured themselves the representativeness of the research for submission. As the narrative elements of the submission develop for each submitting UoA, the representation of the outputs selected for submission in the highlighted areas of research strategies and collaborations will be verified by the REF Board to ensure that one consistent portfolio is produced by the UoA.

80. Since launching the Diverse Research Outputs Working Group, there have been ongoing communications to highlight the variety and richness of the research outputs the University produces.

81. The University of Edinburgh recognises the importance of acknowledging and recording the contribution of all individuals playing a role in the production and publication of research outputs. Therefore, the University has committed to use Pure for recording Contributor Role Taxonomy (CRediT) information. While Pure does not currently support the systematic recording of CRediT roles, all areas are encouraged to utilise the bibliographical notes field in the ‘Notes’ section of the research output record to capture this information until a dedicated functionality is provided. Further information is available for Pure administrators on the Research Output Network SharePoint site.

82. Technicians are valued research output authors and are encouraged to have Pure profiles so their authorship can be reported effectively. This will ensure that the matching tool can include technician authors and non-academic research-conducting authors as per the eligibility criteria defined in REF 2029.

83. The EDI Review Group will be able to use the list of authors from the matching tool to review whether the diversity of authors in the potential output pool is representative of the current staff within

the unit. They will then be able to signal any substantial unequal contributions from authors to the REF Board and/or UoA coordinator as appropriate. This diversity may include protected characteristics, or career stage.

Procedures for ensuring that outputs in UK languages other than English are not treated less favourably in output selection

84. British Sign Language (BSL) is a legally recognised and protected language in Scotland (British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015) and the UK (The British Sign Language Act 2022), and the University of Edinburgh has a British Sign Language Plan (2024-2030).

85. The Scottish Languages Act 2025 is Scottish Government legislation relating to the promotion of Scottish Gaelic and Scots. Scottish Gaelic has also been a promoted and protected language since the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, and The University of Edinburgh has a Gaelic Plan 2025-2030.

86. Where research outputs are created first in a UK language other than English, e.g. BSL and are then translated into English, units are recommended to give priority to the output in the original language as a REF-eligible research output. Alongside these specific languages, where a language is relevant to the research produced, the research output in that language should be prioritised for review and selection for submission, rather than a translation into English. There are no barriers at panel to submitting outputs in languages other than English.

Policies and procedures and responsible research assessment practice

87. Our CoARA action plan details our actions and intentions towards the ten CoARA actions. Most relevant to REF 2029 are:

Commitment 2: Base research assessment primarily on qualitative evaluation for which peer review is central, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.

Commitment 3: Abandon inappropriate uses of research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index.

Commitment 7: Raise awareness of research assessment reform and provide transparent communication, guidance and training on assessment criteria and processes as well as on their use.

88. Our output review guidance to Colleges and UoAs is in line with the principles of DoRA and complementary to our CoARA action plan. In particular, decision makers will use discipline-appropriate established quantitative and qualitative information across the full range of research activity to support the evaluation of all information submitted as part of the REF 2029 assessment. No single quantitative metric will be used in deciding which outputs are to be included.

Staff, Committees, and Training

Please refer to Part 3.

89. The University's REF Board will take responsibility for the research outputs included, acting with due consideration of the recommendations made by REF EDI RG. To ensure consistency and transparency across the University's submission and help implement its REF preparations, while adhering to the REF rules, the University will provide general recommendations to Colleges/Schools/UoAs for review of outputs for REF 2029 submission.

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

90. EqIAs on the University of Edinburgh staff authors of outputs will be undertaken in line with University policies and procedures, and then the data will be compared relative to the cohort of academic staff whose contracts qualify for REF inclusion (as described in part 3), and all eligible staff who have a UoA allocation (as described in Part 4). While these are three different populations, this may inform whether there are observable discrepancies from output selection.

91. Should REF EDI RG inform a UoA or REF Board of apparent inconsistencies in the equality data representing the unit through authorship, the unit decision-makers should be prepared to review their processes and, if necessary, make adjustments.

92. Evaluation of the EqIA for output selection by the REF EDI Review Group included recommendation of the addition of a designated EDI observer, in place for output selection in all units. This will form part of the process document for output selection written once full REF guidance is set.

93. The final EqIA of the REF exercise after submission will include the findings relevant to all policies and procedures in all parts of this Code of Practice document.

Part 6: Appendices

1. **Glossary of abbreviations and acronyms**
2. **Actions deriving from the consultation process**
3. **Referenced material in the CoP**
4. **Equality Impact Assessment**

Glossary of abbreviations and acronyms

REF Research Excellence Framework

HEI Higher Education Institution

EIA and EqIA Equality Impact Assessment

UoA(s) Unit of Assessment(s)

RCAP Research Cultures Action Plan

EDI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

UoE The University of Edinburgh

HESA Higher Education Statistics Agency

CoP Code of Practice (this document)

CoARA Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment

P&M People and Money, the University's HR & finance system

UE University Executive

Actions deriving from the consultation process

While drafting this document the policies herein were made available in consultation with the groups listed in the Governance section (REF Board, REF Ops and the REF EDI RG). Other University groups were consulted also, including the Technicians Steering Committee and the Conveners of the Staff EDI Groups. Comments from those groups, not from the REF EDI RG on the EqIA (and therefore captured in the main document), can be found here. British Sign Language and Scottish Gaelic speakers were consulted specifically on the "Procedures for ensuring that outputs in UK languages other than English are not treated less favourably in output selection" section to ensure they were happy with the wording provided.

The Glossary of abbreviations and acronyms was added following comments through the consultation, including the use of EIA (as used by the UK REF team) and EqIA (as used primarily by the University of Edinburgh) for Equality Impact Assessment.

The University of Edinburgh has an excellent Innovation Career Pathway and following a query at consultation, explicit mention of this was included in Section 3 (Determining Research Independence).

Referenced material in the CoP

Link to Strategy 2030 <https://www.ed.ac.uk/about/strategy-2030>

REF 2029

Research Excellence Framework

University of Edinburgh Equality Outcomes 2025-2029 statement <https://equality-diversity.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2025-04/University%20of%20Edinburgh%20Equality%20Outcomes%202025-2029.pdf>

Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Progress Report 2025 <https://equality-diversity.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2025-04/Equality%20Outcomes%20and%20Mainstreaming%20Progress%20Report%202025.pdf>

University's people-related awards and commitments <https://human-resources.ed.ac.uk/awards-and-commitments-0>

People Strategy <https://strategy-2030.ed.ac.uk/strategy-in-action/university-strategies/people-strategy>

Link to RCAP <https://www.ed.ac.uk/research-innovation/research-cultures/research-cultures-action-plan>

The Research Staff Hub <https://support-for-researchers.ed.ac.uk/>

Information for those on fixed-term contracts <https://human-resources.ed.ac.uk/fixed-term-contracts>

Generative AI Guidance for Staff <https://information-services.ed.ac.uk/computing/comms-and-collab/elm/generative-ai-guidance-for-staff>

Responsible AI & AI safety <https://information-services.ed.ac.uk/computing/comms-and-collab/elm/responsible-ai-and-safety>

Research and Innovation Strategy 2030

<https://edwebcontent.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/research-and-innovation-strategy-2030.pdf>

Innovation Career Pathway <https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/InnovationPathway>

Research Output Network Adding CRedit information to Pure guide

<https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/ResearchOutputNetwork/SitePages/Adding-CRedit-information-to-Pure.aspx>

UoE British Sign Language Plan 2024-2030 <https://british-sign-language.ed.ac.uk/>

UoE Gaelic Language Plan 2025-2030 <https://gaelic.ed.ac.uk/plan/gaelic-language-plan-2025-2030>

UoE CoARA Action Plan <https://zenodo.org/records/15386763>

Link to REF 2021 EqIA <https://research-office.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2025-07/REF%202021%20Equality%20Impact%20Assessment.pdf>

REF Board ToR [REFBoard terms of reference-approved.pdf](#)

University Equality Impact Assessments <https://equality-diversity.ed.ac.uk/EqIA>

Research Excellence Framework Intranet

<https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/ResearchExcellenceFramework>

Link to Points of Contact SharePoint page:

<https://uoe.sharepoint.com/sites/ResearchExcellenceFramework/SitePages/Who-are-the-REF-2029-points-of-contact-.aspx>

List of fellowships <https://2029.ref.ac.uk/publication/research-fellowships/>

REF 2029

Research Excellence Framework

Note: If you have any enquiries about the processes presented here, or their implementation, please email the University's REF team directly: REF2029@ed.ac.uk

If you require this document in an alternative format, such as large print or a coloured background, please contact the University's REF 2029 team:
ref2029@ed.ac.uk



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Equality Impact Assessment Template

If you require this template in an alternative format, such as large print or a coloured background please contact HRHelpline@ed.ac.uk.

You'll find it useful, before filling in this assessment template, to complete the online course:

[Introducing Equality Impact Assessment](#)

This template is designed to be used alongside the:

EqlA [Guidance and Checklist](#)

EqlA [Policy Statement](#)

EqlA covers policies, functions, practices and activities, including decisions and the delivery of services, but will be referred to as 'policy/practice' hereinafter.

A. Key Information	
Policy/practice name:	Determining Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) and Research Independence (RI) for REF 2029 Volume Measure

General back-ground/aims of policy/practice:	The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the system for assessing the quality and impact of research conducted in UK higher education institutions (HEIs). It was first conducted in 2014 and again in 2021, replacing the previous Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). The next REF will complete in 2029. The Volume Measure for the REF 2029 submission ensures that the scale of an institution's submission is proportionate to its research capacity, as well as providing important information on the size and shape of the sector. The volume measure in REF 2029 will capture the information relating to the same group of staff as submitted to REF 2021 i.e., staff with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) and Research Independence (RI), with the data on staff contracts being gathered directly from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Staff record to determine the volume. In the University of Edinburgh, the process for determining SRR and RI is developed in tandem with the development of the University's REF 2029 Code of Practice, and in support of the University's mission to build research cultures which support inclusion, celebrate difference, challenge prejudice and ensure fairness. See Appendix 1 for a copy of the process. The process of determining SRR and RI is embedded in the process of reviewing data in HR records in People & Money, specifically for Academic Employment Function. Academic Employment Function is determined according to the HESA criteria for Academic Employment Function. Independent Researcher is determined by the criteria set out in the University's REF 2029 Code of Practice, which have been approved by the Scottish Funding Council, to determine if academic staff who have been employed to carry out research are independent researchers. Using these criteria for determining SRR and RI means that there is no selection process for inclusion in the REF 2029 Volume Measure. This enables the culture of inclusivity and principles of fairness set out in the University's REF 2029 Code of Practice. The Academic Employment Function for all staff contracts in the University is determined in relation to the work that staff have been employed to carry out. The Academic Employment Function is not affected by any assessment exercises including REF 2029. Therefore, inclusion in the volume measure for REF 2029 should not affect the career trajectory of any academic staff. Additional emphasis of this is the University's decision that no decision about career trajectory will be taken on the basis of the REF 2029 assessment cycle.
School/Dept:	Edinburgh Research Office

Assessed by: (job title)	Senior REF Data Analyst
Sign off by: (job title)	Head of REF, Research Planning & Performance
Sign off date:	17/02/2026
Review date:	February 2027

B. Reason for EqIA	(check one)
New policy/ practice is proposed	☐
Change to existing policy/practice is proposed	☒
Other (describe in Section D below)	☐

C. Who will most impacted by this proposal?

Consider carefully how your proposal will impact both positively and negatively on people from different groups.

Consider the 9 protected characteristics as below in your proposal. There may be other identity characteristics that you wish to also include in your impact assessment. It is expected that you will consider all equality groups for impact. Please indicate below (with a tick) which groups you feel will be most affected by your proposal.

Age	☒	Race (including ethnicity and nationality)	☒	Marriage and civil partnership¹	☐
Disability	☒	Religion or belief (including no religion or belief)	☒	Sex	☒
Gender reassignment	☒	Pregnancy and maternity	☒	Sexual orientation	☒
Other characteristics	☒				

D. Consideration of Impact

Show your considerations of how all of the above protected characteristics may be impacted. The following prompts will help you to reflect:

¹ Note: only the duty to eliminate discrimination applied to marriage and civil partnership. There is no need to have regard to advancing equality or opportunity or fostering good relations in this respect.

- What information and evidence do I have about the needs of relevant equality groups – is this sufficient to fully assess impact?
- Could this policy/practice lead to discrimination (direct or indirect), harassment, victimisation, or create barriers or less favourable treatment for particular groups and how can you mitigate any negative impacts?
- Does this policy/practice contribute to advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations?
- How can communication of the policy/practice be made accessible to all relevant groups?

Inclusion in the REF exercise has historically been seen as relevant to the career progression of academics. Whilst this is clearly negated in the University's REF 2029 Code of Practice and there is no selection process for inclusion in the REF 2029 Volume Measure, the potential continued perception means that we need to assess if particular groups are affected by the process of determining SRR and RI and we need to communicate to the academic community that in this University there is no relationship between being included in REF and their career trajectory. In addition, it is the responsible approach to assess if the Volume Measure that is a product of the Determining SRR and RI process represents the diversity of the academic staff population in the University. This assessment may contribute to developing initiatives to ensure equality of opportunity within the University.

The 2024/25 HESA Staff return was treated as the pilot year for REF volume measure. We used this pilot year to review and amend, if necessary, the Academic Employment Function and research independence of staff contracts stored in HR records and to develop the process and tools to be used for the next HESA Staff returns. The objective of the process is to determine inclusion in the volume measure solely by using the purpose of contracted roles and associated duties. Individual circumstances and protected characteristics do not figure in the process.

Data on the protected characteristics of those included in the volume measure in the 2024/25 HESA Staff return was assessed in relation to data on protected characteristics for the overall staff population, the academic population and the population of relevant academic contract types in the sector. Assessment was done on data that was available and would present meaningful insight. This included data on age, sex, ethnicity, and nationality. Data that represented high non-disclosure rates, e.g. religious belief, disability and sexual orientation, was not included in the assessment.

Assessment of the data shows representations of people with protected characteristics in our volume measure largely aligns with representations of these groups in our wider staff population, our academic staff population and in relevant academic contract types in the sector.

The process was reviewed by the REF EDI Review group, whose remit is to review REF processes, EIAs and report to the relevant University committees (e.g. REF Board, Research Strategy Group) throughout the REF 2029 process (development of Code of Practice, preparation of submission, lessons learned) highlighting areas of potential discrimination and examples of good practice. Where the data highlights potential bias or discrimination, this was drawn to the attention of the

local areas affected. For example, the potential for bias creep in the research independence criteria was addressed by consulting with the College Research Committees and adjusting the process to include consultation and verification steps.

This assessment will be shared with the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion committee and sub-groups to enable them to be aware of the University's preparation for REF and for them to apply insight from the data to their strategies and activities. In addition, the University's REF 2029 Code of Practice will be made openly accessible to all staff on the University's REF SharePoint site with the disconnect between inclusion in the volume measure and career trajectory highlighted in summary and landing page. This disconnect will be included in REF communications made to Colleges, Schools, committees and the like.

The approved version of the process will be made openly accessible on the University's REF SharePoint site and this assessment will be published on the University website

E. Equality Impact Assessment Outcome Select one of the four options below to indicate how the development/review of the policy/practice will be progressed and state the rationale for the decision.	(check one)
Outcome 1: No change required – the assessment is that the policy/practice is/will be robust.	☒
Outcome 2: Adjust the policy or practice – this involves taking steps to remove any barriers, to better advance equality and/or to foster good relations.	☐
Outcome 3: Continue the policy or practice despite the potential for adverse impact, and which can be justified.	☐
Outcome 4: Stop the policy or practice as there are adverse effects which cannot be prevented/mitigated/or justified.	☐

F. Action and Monitoring

Describe any actions you will take to address the findings of this EqIA.

- How can I involve equality groups or communities in the ongoing monitoring, review and potential future development, of this policy/practice?

Describe how the policy/practice will be monitored going forward, to ensure that impact is frequently reviewed. Make sure you add a review date in Section A above.

The process for determining SRR and RI will be implemented in line with the approval of the University's REF 2029 Code of Practice. The process will be applied to the determining of SRR and RI

for the University's 2025-26 and 2026-27 HESA Staff returns. The REF volume measure that results from these HESA Staff returns will be assessed in relation to data on protected characteristics that are included in the HESA Staff return and that have high levels of completion that enables meaningful assessment, i.e. age, sex and ethnicity. The results of the assessment will be shared with and reviewed by the REF EDI Review Group, reported to the REF Board, and shared with the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion committee and sub-groups

The paucity of EDI data will be flagged to the relevant HR departments, e.g. HR Process and HR Business Intelligence, with a recommendation for this to be addressed as action points in their objectives.

Assessment will be repeated following the University's 2026-27 HESA Staff return.

G. Publish

Send your completed EqIA to the HR EDI team (equalitydiversity@ed.ac.uk) to published, and keep a copy for your own records.

Data Summary

The assessment compares the protected characteristics of contracted staff determined to have Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) and Research Independence (RI), i.e. included in the REF volume measure, with the overall staff population in the University, the academic population in the University, and the population of relevant academic contract types in the sector. The relevant academic contract types are:

- Academic contract that is both teaching and research
- Academic contract that is research only

For contracts where the Academic Employment Function is “Academic contract that is research only”, assessment was done on all contracts of this type as well as a subset of these contracts, which were considered to be of research independence.

The assessment uses full person equivalent (FPE) data as this enables the assessment of data for protected characteristics associated with persons and the benchmarking of the University’s data with data for comparative HEI groups in the sector provided in Heidi Plus. Data from Heidi Plus is data from the 2023/24 HESA Staff return.

As shown in the Table 1, the REF volume measure predominantly consists of Academic contracts that is both teaching and research.

Table 1: Percentage split of Academic Employment Functions of persons included and not included in REF 2029 volume measure.

	Not included in REF volume measure	Included in REF volume measure	Total
Academic contract that is both teaching and research	0.00%	15.12%	15.12%
Academic contract that is neither teaching nor research	0.09%	0.00%	0.09%
Academic contract that is research only	13.32 %	1.70%	14.97%
Academic contract that is teaching only	18.72%	0.00%	18.72%
Not an academic contract	52.97%	0.00%	52.97%
Total	83.38%	16.82%	100.00%

Note that for contracts that are “Academic contract that is research only” only those that are considered to be of research independence are included in the REF volume measure.

In addition, assessment was also carried out in relation to the REF 2029 Main Panels, which are the grouping of Unit of Assessments into similar disciplines. The REF 2029 Main Panels are:

- Panel A – Medicine, Health and Life Sciences
- Panel B – Physical Sciences, Engineering and Mathematics
- Panel C – Social Sciences
- Panel D – Arts and Humanities

As shown in Table 2, inclusion in the volume measure is proportionally larger in Main Panels A and B.

Table 2: Percentage split of Academic Employment Functions of persons included in the REF volume measure by Main Panels.

REF 2029 Main Panel	Academic contract that is both teaching and research	Academic contract that is research only	Total
Panel A	26.86%	4.08%	30.93%
Panel B	22.60%	4.20%	26.76%
Panel C	22.90%	1.00%	23.91%
Panel D	17.64%	0.82%	18.46%

Gender

As the data used in the assessment is data from the HESA Staff return, the assessment of gender uses the Sex Identifier data item in the HESA Staff return.

Table 3: Percentage splits of self-disclosed gender according to Academic Employment Functions compared with self-disclosed gender for the overall staff population and the academic population.

	Overall staff population	Academic population	Teaching & Research	Research Only	Research Only Independent	Included in volume measure
Female	55.55%	48.38%	41.16%	49.47%	41.27%	41.18%
Male	43.11%	49.98%	57.69%	48.72%	57.23%	57.63%
Other	0.08%	0.11%	0.10%	0.07%	0.00%	0.09%
Information refused	1.26%	1.53%	1.05%	1.74%	1.51%	1.09%

Females are proportionally under-represented in the volume measure, which stems from their under-representation in the Teaching & Research and Research Only Independent populations. This is even though the gender split is only slightly larger for males in the academic population.

Table 4: Percentage splits of self-disclosed gender according to REF Main Panels for persons included in the volume measure.

	Panel A	Panel B	Panel C	Panel D
Female	45.25%	22.95%	50.51%	48.76%
Male	53.88%	75.91%	48.09%	49.75%
Other	0.00%	0.23%	0.13%	0.00%

Information re-fused	0.88%	0.91%	1.27%	1.48%
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Females are very under-represented in the volume measure for Panel B. This under-representation is in line with national statistics and initiatives aimed at addressing the under-representation of women in STEM careers.

This under-representation of females in the Teaching & Research and Research Only populations in the University is in line with the under-representation of females in these roles in the sector.

Table 5: Percentage splits of self-disclosed gender for Teaching & Research populations in HEI groups. Rounded numbers for HEI groups were taken from Heidi Plus, which uses data from HESA Staff returns.

	University of Edinburgh	Universities UK	Russell Group	Scottish HEIs
Female	41.16%	44%	37%	42%
Male	57.69%	56%	63%	57%
Other	0.10%	0%	0%	0%
Information re-fused	1.05%	Not available	Not available	Not available

Table 6: Percentage splits of self-disclosed gender for Research Only populations in HEI groups. Rounded numbers for HEI groups were taken from Heidi Plus, which uses data from HESA Staff returns.

	University of Edinburgh	Universities UK	Russell Group	Scottish HEIs
Female	49.47%	49%	48%	46%
Male	48.72%	51%	51%	53%
Other	0.07%	0%	0%	1%
Information re-fused	1.74%	Not available	Not available	Not available

Age

Table 7: Percentage splits of age groups according to Academic Employment Functions compared to age groups for the overall staff population and the academic population.

	Overall staff population	Academic population	Teaching & Research	Research Only	Research Only Independent	Included in volume measure
35 years and under	40.11%	43.44%	8.79%	59.79%	26.51%	10.58%
36 - 50 years	34.82%	35.49%	50.93%	33.11%	57.23%	51.55%
51 - 65 years	21.54%	17.67%	34.33%	6.29%	13.25%	32.21%
66 years and over	3.53%	3.40%	5.95%	0.82%	3.01%	5.66%

Academic staff 35 years and under are proportionally under-represented in the volume measure. This could be because of the correlation between age and career development as well as between age and research independence.

Table 8: Percentage splits of age groups according to REF Main Panels for persons included in the volume measure.

	Panel A	Panel B	Panel C	Panel D
35 years and under	7.77%	13.18%	11.32%	10.54%
36 – 50 years	50.93%	50.34%	55.85%	48.76%
51 – 65 years	34.51%	31.14%	27.61%	35.91%
66 years and under	6.78%	5.34%	5.22%	4.78%
Average age	48	47	47	48

The average age of persons included in the volume measure is very similar in each Main Panel and the proportion of age groups is largely similar in each Main Panel.

Comparison with age groups of Teaching & Research staff in the sector shows the under-representation of the 35 years and under age group in the University's Teaching & Research population and the slight over-representation of the same age group in the University's research Only population.

Table 9: Percentage splits of age groups for Teaching & Research populations in HEI groups. Rounded numbers for HEI groups were taken from Heidi Plus, which uses data from HESA Staff returns.

	University of Edinburgh	Universities UK	Russell Group	Scottish HEIs
35 years and under	8.79%	12%	11%	12%
36 - 50 years	50.93%	48%	50%	49%
51 - 65 years	34.33%	35%	35%	35%
66 years and over	5.95%	4%	5%	4%

Table 10: Percentage splits of age groups for Research Only populations in HEI groups. Rounded numbers for HEI groups were taken from Heidi Plus, which uses data from HESA Staff returns.

	University of Edinburgh	Universities UK	Russell Group	Scottish HEIs
35 years and under	59.79%	55%	57%	55%
36 - 50 years	33.11%	34%	34%	34%
51 - 65 years	6.29%	9%	8%	10%
66 years and over	0.82%	1%	1%	1%

Ethnicity

As the data used in the assessment is data from the HESA Staff return, the assessment of ethnicity uses the Ethnic data item in the HESA Staff return. The data is grouped according to the ethnic groups used in Heidi Plus to enable comparison with the sector.

Table 11: Percentage splits of disclosed ethnicity according to Academic Employment Functions compared with disclosed ethnicity for the overall staff population and the academic population.

	Overall staff population	Academic population	Teaching & Research	Research Only	Research Only Independent	Included in volume measure
Asian	8.53%	12.43%	8.01%	14.35%	7.53%	7.97%
Black	1.16%	1.28%	1.15%	1.43%	0.60%	1.09%
Mixed	2.32%	2.82%	2.71%	2.90%	4.22%	2.86%
Other	2.04%	2.75%	2.57%	3.45%	3.31%	2.65%
Unknown/Not available	20.35%	20.71%	6.49%	24.74%	14.46%	7.3%
Prefer not to say	5.73%	6.46%	8.32%	5.02%	9.04%	8.39%
White	59.87%	53.54%	70.75%	48.10%	60.84%	69.74%

It may be said that limited insight can be taken from data on ethnicity as data is not available (include Not available, Not known and Prefer not to say) for over 25% of the overall population and the academic population. The data that is available shows that staff disclosing BAME characteristics are under-represented in the volume measure. It should be noted that both Asian and Black staff make up smaller representations in the Research Only Independent population compared to their representation in the Research Only population and White staff make up larger representation in the Research Only independent population compared to their representation in the Research Only population.

Table 12: Percentage splits of disclosed ethnicity according to REF Main Panels for persons included in the volume measure.

	Panel A	Panel B	Panel C	Panel D
Asian	5.01%	11.36%	9.92%	5.44%
Black	0.49%	0.57%	2.29%	1.32%
Mixed	2.56%	2.84%	3.05%	3.13%
Other	1.57%	2.84%	3.82%	2.64%
Unknown/Not available	7.57%	4.77%	8.90%	8.40%
Prefer not to say	9.93%	9.09%	6.49%	7.41%
White	72.86%	68.52%	65.52%	71.66%

The data that is available for BAME characteristics show that BAME staff are under-represented in Panels B and C and very under-represented in Panels A and D.

Comparison with data on ethnicity for both Teaching & Research and Research Only staff in the sector shows under-representation of Asian and Black staff in the University compared to representation of these staff in the sector.

Table 13: Percentage splits of ethnicity for Teaching & Research populations in HEI groups. Rounded numbers for HEI groups and grouping of ethnicity were taken from Heidi Plus, which uses data from HESA Staff returns.

	University of Edinburgh	Universities UK	Russell Group	Scottish HEIs
Asian	8.01%	11%	11%	10%
Black	1.15%	3%	1%	2%
Mixed	2.71%	3%	2%	2%
Other	2.57%	3%	2%	2%
Unknown/Not available	6.49%	7%	9%	8%
Prefer not to say	8.32%	Not available	Not available	Not available
White	70.75%	73%	74%	76%

Table 14: Percentage splits of ethnicity for Research Only populations in HEI groups. Rounded numbers for HEI groups and grouping of ethnicity were taken from Heidi Plus, which uses data from HESA Staff returns.

	University of Edinburgh	Universities UK	Russell Group	Scottish HEIs
Asian	14.35%	19%	19%	15%
Black	1.43%	3%	2%	2%
Mixed	2.9%	3%	3%	3%
Other	3.45%	3%	3%	3%
Unknown/Not available		14%	15%	18%
Prefer not to say	5.02%	Not available	Not available	Not available
White	48.1%	59%	58%	58%

Nationality

Table 15: Percentage splits of nationality according to Academic Employment Functions compared with nationality for the overall staff population and the academic population.

	Overall staff population	Academic population	Teaching & Research	Research Only	Research Only Independent	Included in volume measure
EU27 and EEA	18.33%	22.47%	22.39%	26.14%	25.00%	22.63%
International	19.83%	28.96%	19.78%	33.07%	20.78%	19.89%
UK	61.84%	48.57%	57.83%	40.79%	54.22%	57.48%

Academic staff from the UK are proportionally over-represented in the volume measure. This over-representation reflects the representation of nationality in the Teaching & Research population which were wholly included in the volume measure.

Table 16: Percentage splits of nationality according to REF Main Panels for persons included in the volume measure.

	Panel A	Panel B	Panel C	Panel D
EU27 and EEA	21.34%	25.91%	22.52%	20.10%
International	11.21%	23.41%	27.10%	19.93%
UK	67.45%	50.68%	50.38%	59.97%

Academic staff from the UK are proportionally over-represented in all the Main Panels, but particularly in Main Panel A.

Comparison with data on nationality for both Teaching & Research and Research Only staff in the sector shows slightly higher representation of non-UK staff in the University.

Table 17: Percentage splits of nationality for Teaching & Research populations in HEI groups. Rounded numbers for HEI groups were taken from Heidi Plus, which uses data from HESA Staff returns.

	University of Edinburgh	Universities UK	Russell Group	Scottish HEIs
EU27 and EEA	22.39%	16%	21%	18%
International	19.78%	16%	19%	18%
United Kingdom	57.83%	67%	60%	64%

Table 18: Percentage splits of nationality for Research Only populations in HEI groups. Rounded numbers for HEI groups were taken from Heidi Plus, which uses data from HESA Staff returns.

	University of Edinburgh	Universities UK	Russell Group	Scottish HEIs
EU27 and EEA	26.14%	20%	21%	22%
International	33.07%	30%	31%	28%
United Kingdom	40.79%	50%	48%	50%



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Equality Impact Assessment Template

If you require this template in an alternative format, such as large print or a coloured background please contact HRHelpline@ed.ac.uk.

You'll find it useful, before filling in this assessment template, to complete the online course:

[Introducing Equality Impact Assessment](#)

This template is designed to be used alongside the:

EqlA [Guidance and Checklist](#)

EqlA [Policy Statement](#)

EqlA covers policies, functions, practices and activities, including decisions and the delivery of services, but will be referred to as 'policy/practice' hereinafter.

A. Key Information	
Policy/practice name:	Contracts being allocated to REF 2029 Unit of Assessment in the HESA return (Part 4 of the REF 2029 Code of Practice)
General back-ground/aims of policy/practice:	All research-conducting contracts returned to HESA (i.e. Academic Employment Function 2 and 3) must be allocated a unit of assessment. This is a requirement of both HESA and the REF guidance. The decision-making regarding allocation to a specific unit of assessment is detailed in the Code of Practice (Section 4), and this EqlA will be an appendix to that document. The aim of the policy is to provide accurate data on our research populations in the units of assessment that we return to HESA and the national funding councils. The REF policies are built on principles of Robustness, Transparency and Equity and Inclusion.
School/Dept:	Edinburgh Research Office
Assessed by: (job title)	Senior REF Data Analyst
Sign off by: (job title)	Head of REF, Research Planning & Performance

Sign off date:	09/02/2026
Review date:	February 2027

B. Reason for EqIA	(check one)
New policy/ practice is proposed	☒
Change to existing policy/practice is proposed	☐
Other (describe in Section D below)	☐

C. Who will most impacted by this proposal?

Consider carefully how your proposal will impact both positively and negatively on people from different groups.

Consider the 9 protected characteristics as below in your proposal. There may be other identity characteristics that you wish to also include in your impact assessment. It is expected that you will consider all equality groups for impact. Please indicate below (with a tick) which groups you feel will be most affected by your proposal.

Age	☒	Race (including ethnicity and nationality)	☒	Marriage and civil partnership²	☐
Disability	☐	Religion or belief (including no religion or belief)	☐	Sex	☐
Gender reassignment	☐	Pregnancy and maternity	☐	Sexual orientation	☐
Other characteristics	☒				

D. Consideration of Impact

Show your considerations of how all of the above protected characteristics may be impacted. The following prompts will help you to reflect:

² Note: only the duty to eliminate discrimination applied to marriage and civil partnership. There is no need to have regard to advancing equality or opportunity or fostering good relations in this respect.

- What information and evidence do I have about the needs of relevant equality groups – is this sufficient to fully assess impact?
- Could this policy/practice lead to discrimination (direct or indirect), harassment, victimisation, or create barriers or less favourable treatment for particular groups and how can you mitigate any negative impacts?
- Does this policy/practice contribute to advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations?
- How can communication of the policy/practice be made accessible to all relevant groups?

The needs of equality groups are not likely to be affected by the unit of assessment that their contracts are categorised as. This policy could not lead to discrimination (direct or indirect), harassment, or victimisation, as the unit of assessment is a reporting tool to outside the university, that does not affect the academic employment function or contract, or the individuals in their daily professional life. The unit of assessment has no bearing on the organisational structures of the university. However, it is the responsible approach to assess if the policy for allocation of units of assessment to contracts has any impacts to equality groups. Assessment will be carried out when data is available and will include intersectionality considerations.

The policy should not create barriers or less favourable treatment for particular groups, for the same reasons, however the policy will have the most effect on early career researchers, and researchers who have moved from abroad to the university since 2021, with both groups not having had a unit of assessment allocation before. While not protected groups themselves, early career researchers may intersect with age, and academics who have moved from outside the UK may intersect with nationality.

The communications around the REF 2029 Code of Practice will be widespread and through multiple media to ensure that all academics are aware of what REF 2029 means for them as individuals. In addition to events for general university audiences, events on *What is REF* can be specifically targeted at academics new to REF exercises.

E. Equality Impact Assessment Outcome Select one of the four options below to indicate how the development/review of the policy/practice will be progressed and state the rationale for the decision.	(check one)
Outcome 1: No change required – the assessment is that the policy/practice is/will be robust.	☒

Outcome 2: Adjust the policy or practice – this involves taking steps to remove any barriers, to better advance equality and/or to foster good relations.	☐
Outcome 3: Continue the policy or practice despite the potential for adverse impact, and which can be justified.	☐
Outcome 4: Stop the policy or practice as there are adverse effects which cannot be prevented/mitigated/or justified.	☐

F. Action and Monitoring

Describe any actions you will take to address the findings of this EqIA.

- How can I involve equality groups or communities in the ongoing monitoring, review and potential future development, of this policy/practice?

Describe how the policy/practice will be monitored going forward, to ensure that impact is frequently reviewed. Make sure you add a review date in Section A above.

The contract allocations to unit of assessment will be monitored annually, using the 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27 HESA data returned to see whether there are trends in the data that suggest bias or skewing in this policy. Any evidence of this will be brought to the REF EDI RG, and evaluated as described in the Code of Practice, and their recommendations will be escalated to the REF Board for a policy amendment in the REF 2029 Code of Practice.

G. Publish

Send your completed EqIA to the HR EDI team (equalitydiversity@ed.ac.uk) to published, and keep a copy for your own records.



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EqlA [Policy Statement](#)

EqlA covers policies, functions, practices and activities, including decisions and the delivery of services, but will be referred to as 'policy/practice' hereinafter.

A. Key Information	
Policy/practice name:	Selecting outputs for submission to REF 2029 (Part 5 of the REF 2029 Code of Practice)
General background/aims of policy/practice:	The Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU) element of REF 2029 captures information about each Unit of Assessment's various and diverse contributions to knowledge and understanding through the assessment of a pool of submitted research outputs – the number of outputs is determined by the REF volume measure, multiplied by 2.5 and rounded to the nearest whole number. The aim of the policy under assessment is to review and select high quality outputs for submission to REF 2029, while retaining fairness and ensuring no detriment to the career progression of authors (and non-authors) in the university. The REF policies are built on principles of Robustness, Transparency and Equity and Inclusion.
School/Dept:	Edinburgh Research Office
Assessed by: (job title)	Senior REF Data Analyst
Sign off by: (job title)	Head of REF, Research Planning & Performance

Sign off date:	09/02/2026
Review date:	March 2027

B. Reason for EqIA	(check one)
New policy/ practice is proposed	☒
Change to existing policy/practice is proposed	☐
Other (describe in Section D below)	☐

C. Who will most impacted by this proposal?

Consider carefully how your proposal will impact both positively and negatively on people from different groups.

Consider the 9 protected characteristics as below in your proposal. There may be other identity characteristics that you wish to also include in your impact assessment. It is expected that you will consider all equality groups for impact. Please indicate below (with a tick) which groups you feel will be most affected by your proposal.

Age	☒	Race (including ethnicity and nationality)	☒	Marriage and civil partnership³	☐
Disability	☒	Religion or belief (including no religion or belief)	☒	Sex	☒
Gender reassignment	☒	Pregnancy and maternity	☒	Sexual orientation	☒
Other characteristics	☒				

D. Consideration of Impact

Show your considerations of how all of the above protected characteristics may be impacted. The following prompts will help you to reflect:

³ Note: only the duty to eliminate discrimination applied to marriage and civil partnership. There is no need to have regard to advancing equality or opportunity or fostering good relations in this respect.

- What information and evidence do I have about the needs of relevant equality groups – is this sufficient to fully assess impact?
- Could this policy/practice lead to discrimination (direct or indirect), harassment, victimisation, or create barriers or less favourable treatment for particular groups and how can you mitigate any negative impacts?
- Does this policy/practice contribute to advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations?
- How can communication of the policy/practice be made accessible to all relevant groups?

The needs of authors from equality groups are not likely to be affected by selection or non-selection of outputs that they have authored in the submission to REF 2029. The Code of Practice contains a general principle that “Neither contribution nor non-contribution of such materials to REF will be considered in any decision about an individual's career trajectory at the University.” However, it is the responsible approach to assess if the policy for the selection of outputs for review and for submission has any impacts related to the protected characteristics of authors providing the substantive link eligibility for the outputs. Assessment will be carried out when data is available and will include intersectionality considerations.

This policy could not lead to discrimination (direct or indirect), harassment, or victimisation, as output selection is an aspect of an institution level assessment, not an individual performance assessment. The policy should not create barriers or less favourable treatment for particular groups, for the same reasons. Responsible review of the outputs is designed through the indicative ranking being based on peer review, and each output review having multiple reviewers. The matching tool for identifying substantive link to outputs is to aid unit-level decision-makers determine the eligibility of outputs based on REF 2029 output eligibility requirements, i.e. output eligibility period and eligible employment relationships. Names of individual authors will not be included in the tool thus effectively removing the need for those decision-makers to re-couple outputs to individual authors themselves, which could be a potential source of bias. In addition, the policy recommends that decisions on output selection are made by unit level panels and not individuals, thus reinforcing the commitment to mitigate risk of bias.

All decision-makers are required to have completed the listed training on unconscious and implicit bias, and a REF-specific training package once available. Acknowledging that completion of training does not always correlate to implementation of training, the policy includes recommendation that unit-level selection panels should include one member who takes on the responsibility for review and observation of any impact on protected characteristics and the intersectionality of protected characteristics.

In relation to “Procedures for ensuring that outputs in UK languages other than English are not treated less favourably in output selection”, this policy may contribute to advancing equality of opportunity in that the policy outlines where there are research outputs that are created first in a UK language other than English, e.g. BSL and are then translated into English, units are recommended to give priority to the output in the original language as a REF-eligible research output. Alongside these specific languages, where a language is relevant to

the research produced, the research output in that language should be prioritised for review and selection for submission, rather than a translation into English. This may have effects on national groups which may feel unable to publish research in their first language and, in the case of BSL, deaf academics.

The communications around the REF 2029 Code of Practice will be widespread and through multiple media to ensure that all academics are aware of what REF 2029 means for them as individuals.

E. Equality Impact Assessment Outcome Select one of the four options below to indicate how the development/review of the policy/practice will be progressed and state the rationale for the decision.	(check one)
Outcome 1: No change required – the assessment is that the policy/practice is/will be robust.	☒
Outcome 2: Adjust the policy or practice – this involves taking steps to remove any barriers, to better advance equality and/or to foster good relations.	☐
Outcome 3: Continue the policy or practice despite the potential for adverse impact, and which can be justified.	☐
Outcome 4: Stop the policy or practice as there are adverse effects which cannot be prevented/mitigated/or justified.	☐

F. Action and Monitoring Describe any actions you will take to address the findings of this EqIA. • How can I involve equality groups or communities in the ongoing monitoring, review and potential future development, of this policy/practice? Describe how the policy/practice will be monitored going forward, to ensure that impact is frequently reviewed. Make sure you add a review date in Section A above.
The data from authors providing substantive link at the review stage will be monitored using the 2025/26 HESA data, and the data from authors providing substantive link at the selection stage will be monitored using the 2026/27 HESA respectively. These data reviews will be used to see whether there are trends in the data that suggest bias or skewing in this policy. Any evidence of this will be brought to the REF EDI RG, and evaluated as described in the Code of Practice, and their recommendations will be escalated to the REF Board for a policy amendment in the REF 2029 Code of Practice, or for lessons learned before the next REF as appropriate.

G. Publish

Send your completed EqIA to the HR EDI team (equalitydiversity@ed.ac.uk) to published, and keep a copy for your own records.