

Code of Practice

Institution name: University of Bristol

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Executive Summary

This Code of Practice (CoP) sets out how the University of Bristol will implement key requirements for REF 2029 in a fair, transparent and inclusive way. It explains the processes for:

- Identifying staff contracts which confer Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR).
- Determining research independence for research-only contracts.
- Allocating contracts to Units of Assessment (UoAs).
- Selecting research outputs for submission.

These decisions are applied at the contract level, not the individual level, to avoid unintended impacts on careers. They are based on UK Funding Bodies' guidance and align with our institutional commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion, responsible research assessment, and transparency.

REF 2029 introduces important changes from previous exercises, including the removal of staff census lists and a stronger emphasis on responsible assessment. Our approach ensures that REF decisions do not act as judgements on personal performance and that submissions reflect the quality and breadth of research undertaken across the University.

Consultation and Engagement

This CoP has been developed through an open consultation process.

Staff Consultation: All staff and postgraduate researchers were invited to review the draft CoP and provide feedback via an anonymous online survey between 20 October and 10 November 2025. Feedback received during this period has informed the final version of the document.

Union Engagement: The three recognised trade unions were notified of the consultation. The University and College Unions (UCU) leadership have read, discussed, and commented on this document and their perspectives have been taken into account.

Contact Details

For questions or clarification about this Code of Practice, please contact the University REF Team at ref-help@bristol.ac.uk.

Document Control

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Approved by: University Research Committee (URC) on the recommendation of the REF Oversight Board (ROB), Academic Leadership Board (ALB) and University Executive Board (UEB), with the endorsement of the Research Culture Committee (RCC),

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Part 1: Introduction

1.1 Underpinning Principles

This Code of Practice (CoP) sets out the University of Bristol's approach to key decisions required for REF 2029, specifically determining the volume measure and selecting research outputs for submission. It provides a clear, auditable framework that aligns with the underpinning REF principles of robustness, transparency, equality of opportunity and inclusion as follows:

- **Robustness:** The processes set out in this CoP are designed to ensure that the identification of contracts contributing to the REF volume measure accurately and reliably reflects staff responsibilities. Decisions are based on contract data, institutional Human Resources (HR) records and consistent application of the UK Funding Bodies' [REF guidance](#). Regular validation is undertaken in collaboration with academic and professional services leads to maintain accuracy and integrity.
- **Transparency:** Information about REF processes and the CoP is communicated to staff through internal channels, including a dedicated internal [REF SharePoint site](#) that supports understanding and engagement. The current version of this CoP will be published on the University's external website and kept up to date. Staff can also access the [REF 2029 Staff Data Privacy Statement](#) (Annex E), which sets out how personal data is used in REF preparations, including the lawful basis for processing, the types of data involved and individuals' rights under the [UK General Data Protection Regulation \(UK GDPR\)](#).
- **Equality of opportunity and inclusion:** Our approach to REF is grounded in fairness and a commitment to valuing the diversity of people and their involvement in research. Submission decisions are impartial and evidence-based, recognising a broad range of contributions. All processes are designed to minimise bias, uphold the Public Sector Equality Duty and protect freedom of speech and academic freedom of expression, while reflecting the University's commitments to inclusive research culture and responsible assessment. This includes ensuring that outputs produced in British Sign Language (BSL) and Welsh are not treated less favourably than outputs produced in English and that assessment processes support equitable consideration irrespective of language or format.

Record keeping and assurance: All decisions and processes described in this CoP will be documented and retained for audit and assurance purposes. Records will be maintained by the University REF Team, providing a transparent and verifiable evidence base for internal oversight and any external audit or review by the UK Funding Bodies.

Changes in employment circumstances

Decisions made under this Code of Practice are generally applied at contract level and are not subject to individual appeal unless otherwise stated. However, where there is a substantive change to the underlying employment relationship that may alter the REF classification of a contract (for example, promotion, progression, award of independent research funding, change in duties, or movement to a different contract type), the relevant REF determination may be reviewed as part of the University's normal REF update cycle or through an exceptional review where appropriate. This process is intended to ensure that REF records remain accurate and reflective of current contractual responsibilities rather than to reconsider previous decisions.

1.2 Contextualisation within Institutional Policies

This CoP is grounded in our wider institutional policies and strategic commitments, which promote a responsible, inclusive and high-quality research environment. These values shape how we assess, support and recognise research across the REF 2029 cycle.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI): As outlined in the institutional [EDI Policy Statement](#) and EDI Strategy, our ambition is to create a university where everyone can thrive and where equality of opportunity is embedded. Our REF processes are designed to support fair, inclusive decision-making. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is conducted to identify and mitigate any disproportionate impacts on individuals or groups with protected characteristics. This reflects our broader institutional priorities to:

- Design inclusive policies and processes by default.
- Ensure fair access to recognition, regardless of contract type or career stage.
- Support under-represented groups across our research community.
- Equip decision-makers to lead inclusively and drive cultural change.

The University believes that diversity is integral to research excellence. REF 2029 provides an opportunity to recognise a wide range of research contributions and foster a culture of inclusion, respect and belonging.

Support for staff on fixed-term and part-time contracts: The University recognises that staff on fixed-term and part-time contracts may experience different barriers to participation, progression and access to opportunities. Through wider institutional policies and practices, the University seeks to mitigate these risks and support equitable participation in research and REF-related activity. This includes flexible and blended working arrangements that support different working patterns and caring responsibilities; reimbursement of eligible additional caring costs through the Travel and Expenses Policy where attendance is required outside an individual's normal working pattern; and access to institutional development and support schemes on an equitable basis, including the Returning Carers Scheme where eligibility criteria are met.

The University also seeks to support equitable progression and recognition through its Academic Promotions Framework. Recent changes to the framework have broadened recognition of contributions and have been associated with measurable improvements in promotion outcomes for colleagues working part-time. More broadly, the University continues to review issues relating to career progression, contract precarity and sustainable career development as part of its wider research culture and inclusion agenda.

Responsible Research Assessment: We are also committed to responsible and transparent approaches to research assessment, aligned with key global frameworks:

- In 2017, we endorsed the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#), affirming our commitment to assess research on its own merits, not journal metrics. This underpins the institutional [Statement on Responsible Research Assessment](#), which promotes qualitative review, responsible use of metrics and recognition of diverse contributions.
- In September 2024, we became the first UK university to sign the [Barcelona Declaration on Open Research Information](#), committing to transparency, openness and interoperability in how research information is managed.

- In February 2025, we signed the [Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment \(ARRA\)](#) and joined the associated [Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment \(CoARA\)](#). As of June 2025, we serve as a co-lead of the [CoARA UK National Chapter](#), demonstrating our commitment to sector-wide reform and institutional collaboration.

These commitments shape our REF 2029 approach, ensuring processes are fair, evidence based and aligned with international best practice.

1.3 Update on Actions Since REF 2021

Since REF 2021, the University has undertaken a series of strategic and operational actions to address recommendations from previous Equality Impact Assessments and to strengthen the integrity, inclusivity and effectiveness of REF preparations. Key actions include:

- **Delivery of a two-year institutional REF Programme (2023–2025)** to enable a more proportionate approach to planning and preparing for REF 2029, including investment in structural resilience and improved research information quality through Pure system integrations and data assurance processes.
- **Development of a broader REF 2029 Code of Practice**, designed to complement and expand on the externally approved Code of Practice, supporting transparent and responsible practice across all aspects of REF submission development.
- **Strengthened coordination and assurance mechanisms**, including continuous assurance of submission data and alignment with institutional strategy and priorities.
- **Establishment of a revised REF governance structure** to ensure clear accountability, academic leadership and consistent decision-making across the REF cycle. Further detail is provided in Section 1.4.

1.4 REF 2029 Governance Framework

The University has established a clear and proportionate governance structure for REF 2029 to ensure transparency, fairness, accountability and consistent decision-making across all aspects of submission development. This structure underpins the processes described throughout this Code of Practice and is aligned with wider institutional governance for workplace culture and inclusion, including overlapping membership with other bodies.

REF Oversight Board (ROB)

The REF Oversight Board is the University's senior decision-making body for REF. It is responsible for institutional REF policy, strategy and compliance with this Code of Practice, and for assuring institutional readiness for submission. The ROB receives quarterly reports from each Faculty REF Board and approves key submission elements before formal notification to the University Research Committee (URC).

Faculty REF Boards (FRBs)

Each Faculty has a Faculty REF Board, chaired by the Faculty Academic Director for REF. FRBs operate with delegated authority from the ROB to oversee and coordinate REF activity within the Faculty. They review and approve recommendations from Unit of Assessment (UoA) Committees,

ensure compliance with institutional policies and the Code of Practice, and escalate issues requiring institutional attention.

Unit of Assessment Committees (UoA Committees)

UoA Committees lead the development of REF submission components at disciplinary level. Their responsibilities include output review and calibration, development and review of impact case studies, shaping the Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE) evidence base, and making recommendations on research independence and UoA allocation. UoA Committees report to their Faculty REF Board and operate in a proportionate, locally appropriate manner.

University REF Team

The University REF Team provides operational coordination, analytical and data support, and policy guidance across all governance levels. The team supports the application of this Code of Practice, ensures the integrity of REF data, facilitates institutional assurance processes and maintains REF information systems, including the internal [REF SharePoint site](#).

Principles of operation

Across all levels of governance:

- decisions are based on evidence and consistent application of this CoP.
- processes must reflect responsible research assessment and inclusive practice.
- equality impact assessment is embedded and monitored throughout the REF cycle.
- roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and reflected in supporting documentation.
- proportionate record-keeping ensures transparency and auditability.

Diversity monitoring

To support inclusive and evidence-informed governance, all REF committees will undertake routine diversity monitoring of membership and perspectives. This work is designed to strengthen diversity of thought and inclusive decision-making across the REF Oversight Board, Faculty REF Boards and UoA Committees.

A provisional exercise was undertaken with the REF Oversight Board in October 2025, using anonymised demographic analysis and a voluntary member survey to understand representation and identify gaps. The same approach will be rolled out to Faculty REF Boards and UoA Committees, with findings used to inform reflection on committee composition, engagement practices and ways of working. All data will be aggregated and anonymised.

Part 2: Identifying Staff Contracts with Significant Responsibility for Research

*REF 2029 no longer requires universities to submit a list of eligible staff. Instead, we identify **contracts** (not individuals) that have a significant responsibility for research. This information is used only to calculate the number of outputs and impact case studies required for each UoA. It does not affect whether an output or case study can be included in the submission.*

2.1 Policies and Procedures

All Pathway 1 (Teaching and Research — ACEMPFUN 3) contracts in the HESA staff record already comprehensively identify those with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR). No further process is required. For clarity:

- Pathway 2 contracts (Research-Only - ACEMPFUN 2): Eligibility for inclusion in the volume measure is determined through the research independence process outlined in Part 3 of this CoP.
- Pathway 3 (Teaching-Only - ACEMPFUN 1), Professional Services and Technical contracts: These are excluded from the volume-measure calculation, even if they meet SRR or research independence criteria.

2.2 Staff, Committees and Training

No additional processes, committees or training are required for identifying SRR.

2.3 Appeals

No appeals process is required for SRR identification.

2.4 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

No separate EIA is required for SRR.

Part 3: Determining Research Independence

*For research-only contracts, we check whether the role involves **independent research leadership** rather than supporting someone else's project. REF uses independence status to calculate research capacity; it is not used to judge individuals or affect output eligibility. Research independence is assessed at the **contract level**, using clear criteria based on role expectations.*

3.1 Policies and Procedures

An annual process is run to determine whether Pathway 2 (Research-Only — ACEMPFUN 2) contracts confer research independence. Only contracts confirmed as independent are considered to have Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR). This determination is used solely for the REF volume measure and has no bearing on output selection, as outlined in Part 5.

A Pathway 2 contract is considered independent when the role involves self-directed research and leadership of a research agenda, rather than primarily supporting another individual's research programme. In line with REF guidance, research assistant contracts will only be classified as independent in exceptional circumstances.¹

Criteria and Evidence

Research independence determinations draw on multiple evidence sources, including, but not necessarily limited to:

- Contract data from MyERP (HR system).

¹ Research assistants are primarily employed to support another individuals' research rather than pursuing independent research. They are usually funded through research grants or contracts from Research Councils, charities, the European Union (EU), other overseas sources, industry, or other commercial enterprises, but may also be funded by the institution.

- WorkTribe data on externally funded research awards.²
- The UK Funding Bodies' list of [independent fellowships](#).
- Terms and conditions of fellowships or grants, where necessary, to confirm whether the award confers independence.

For fellowships classified as “transition to independence”, contracts will normally be considered non-independent for REF purposes. However, where additional indicators demonstrate that the individual is exercising independence, this classification may be adjusted. When the fellowship concludes and the individual moves to a new contract, independence will be reassessed.

Independence is determined using the following criteria:

1. Independence evident from contract grade (automatic)

Research-only contracts at Grades L or M are classified as independent, as research leadership is an inherent expectation of these roles (see Annex C: Pathway 2 Academic Staff Role Profiles).

2. Independence not evident from contract grade (indicator-based):

Research-only contracts at Grade K or below may be classified as independent where one or more of the following indicators apply:

- Lead applicant on an awarded externally funded research project (i.e. principal investigator).
- Holder of a competitively awarded fellowship requiring research independence.
- Leadership of a research group or substantial or specialised work package.

Additional indicators for Panels C and D:

- Named co-applicant on an externally funded research award.
- Substantial intellectual contribution to the design, conduct or interpretation of research.

Further considerations:

- Indicators will be interpreted with reference to disciplinary norms within each UoA to support fair, consistent and context-appropriate application.
- Authorship on research outputs is not used as an indicator of independence.
- Once a contract has been classified as independent, this status will normally continue unless the staff member moves to a new contract, in which case independence is reassessed.

Decision-making and Communication

The University conducts an annual process to determine research independence, drawing on contract data, information on research awards and fellowships, and clear independence indicators. Access to research independence data is restricted to the University REF Team and designated decision-makers within the REF governance framework (see Section 1.4). Decisions follow a defined annual workflow to ensure consistency and data quality.

² Some awards or fellowships may not appear under the award holder's name in WorkTribe. These can often be identified by job title (e.g. Marie Curie Fellow) or confirmed by academic leads during data validation checks.

Annual workflow:

1. Initial determinations

The University REF Team applies the agreed criteria to all Pathway 2 contracts to produce initial independence determinations.

2. Review

UoA Coordinators and Heads of School review the determinations, confirming or querying the proposed classifications.

3. Approval

- UoA Committees confirm contract-level classifications.
- Faculty REF Boards review and approve summary data.
- The REF Oversight Board approves Faculty-level classifications for inclusion in the HESA Staff Return.

4. Finalisation and submission

All Pathway 2 contracts are recorded in MyERP as Independent (REFQUALCON = 1) or Not independent (REFQUALCON = 2). These classifications are then submitted via the annual HESA Staff Return.

Data quality is assured through cross-checks between MyERP and WorkTribe, local validation by School and Faculty staff, and documentation of any corrections before submission.

To minimise the personalisation of REF decisions, and to avoid research independence classifications being misinterpreted as indicators of individual research quality or performance, staff are not routinely notified of the research independence classification recorded for their contract(s) in the HESA staff record. This approach reflects lessons learned from previous REF exercises and is supported by the Equality Impact Assessment (Annex A), which recognises that independence status is closely linked to seniority and access to research funding. These factors are shaped by wider patterns of employment and progression within the research workforce, such that communicating individual classifications could risk reinforcing existing structural inequalities or unintended perceptions of inclusion or exclusion from REF processes. Consistent with REF policy, outputs are not tied to the volume measure, and independence classifications are used solely for REF purposes and not for any other purpose, including promotion, appraisal or career progression processes.

Staff may, however, request confirmation or review of the independence classification recorded for their contract(s) in the HESA staff record by contacting the University REF Team at ref-help@bristol.ac.uk.

The criteria and processes for determining research independence are set out in this CoP and published on the [REF SharePoint site](#).

3.2 Staff, Committees and Training

Roles and Responsibilities

The processes for determining research independence operate within the REF governance framework described in Section 1.4. Responsibilities are distributed across advisory and decision-making roles at UoA, Faculty and institutional level.

Advisory roles support the process by managing data, providing analysis and ensuring accuracy. Faculty REF Managers and the University Research Assessment Manager oversee the operation of the volume measure within Faculties and provide advice on research independence. The University Research Evaluation Manager develops reports and dashboards to support understanding of volume measure data, while School Managers advise on the accuracy of staff and contract information.

Decision-making responsibility rests with designated academic and governance bodies. UoA Coordinators, Heads of School and School Research Directors make determinations of research independence in line with the published criteria. These decisions are reviewed by Academic REF Directors to ensure consistency across Faculties. UoA Committees consider and recommend independence decisions to Faculty REF Boards, which approve UoA-level volume measure data and make recommendations to the REF Oversight Board. The REF Oversight Board provides final ratification to ensure institutional consistency and assurance.

Training

Staff involved in reviewing or approving research independence determinations are required to complete institutional training covering responsible research assessment, independence criteria and the avoidance of bias in decision-making. Training materials are reviewed regularly and updated as required. Core training is delivered through the University's Develop system, enabling monitoring of completion.

3.3 Appeals

Research independence classifications are not subject to appeal. This does not prevent review where there has been a substantive change to the expectations of the contract that may affect research independence status, such as promotion, progression, award of an independent fellowship, material change in duties, or movement to a different contract. In such cases, classifications may be reconsidered through the University's established REF update processes. Classifications are applied at the contract level solely for the purpose of calculating the REF volume measure and do not affect individuals' roles, performance evaluation or eligibility to submit outputs. Staff may request access to information regarding their REF independence status to check for accuracy in line with the process set out in this CoP. Requests can be submitted to the University REF Team at ref-help@bristol.ac.uk.

Any concerns about the use or interpretation of volume measure data or independence status beyond its intended purpose may also be raised with the University REF Team at ref-help@bristol.ac.uk. These concerns will be treated confidentially and reviewed in line with the University's commitment to responsible research assessment and fair treatment of staff.

In addition to the University's internal processes, the UK Funding Bodies operate a formal complaints mechanism for individuals who believe an institution has not adhered to its approved CoP. Where a complaint is upheld, corrective action may be applied to the submission. Full details of this process will be published by the Funding Bodies on the [REF 2029 website](#) in due course.

3.4 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

EIA is embedded within the process for determining research independence to ensure that it is applied fairly and consistently and does not result in disproportionate impacts on staff with protected

characteristics. The approach recognises disciplinary and career-stage variation in indicators of independence and the need for context-sensitive assessment.

A proportionate EIA has been undertaken in line with the University's EIA guidance and is provided in Annex A. Subsequent annual updates will be made available to staff via the [REF SharePoint site](#). To minimise the risk of unintended consequences for staff, all information related to research independence is handled confidentially and shared only where necessary, using anonymised or aggregated formats wherever appropriate. This ensures that REF-related data is used solely for its intended purpose and does not adversely affect individual staff.

Evidence Base and Analyses

Using 2024–25 HESA Staff Return data, the following analyses were undertaken:

- Demographic comparison of Pathway 2 staff whose contracts are classified as independent with those classified as not independent, to identify any disproportionate patterns of representation across protected characteristics.
- Examination of independence status by protected characteristic and contract type (e.g. part-time, fixed-term) to identify any structural disparities and intersecting factors, such as the historical tendency for female staff to be over-represented in part-time roles.
- Comparison of the representation of protected characteristics across Pathway 2 staff and Pathway 1 (teaching and research) staff to identify broader demographic trends.
- Examination of the 'indicator-based' pool of staff, comparing those who met the indicators and were classified as independent with those who did not meet indicators and were classified as not independent, to identify any patterns related to equality.

Due to small numbers within individual UoAs, data were aggregated at Main Panel and institutional level to identify broad patterns. All analyses involving personal or demographic data follow [HESA Standard Rounding Methodology](#) to reduce the risk of identifying individuals, ensuring compliance with data protection legislation and sector best practice. These analyses will be repeated annually to monitor the demographics of staff on contracts classified as independent and identify any trends requiring attention.

High-level Findings

Analysis undertaken to date suggests that observed demographic patterns within the REF volume measure primarily reflect existing patterns of employment and progression within the research-only workforce, rather than impacts arising from the process for determining research independence itself. On the basis of the evidence available to date, no disproportionate or adverse impacts have been identified across protected characteristics that can be attributed to the operation of the independence determination process. However, recognising the close association between independence status, seniority and access to research funding, a precautionary mitigation has been introduced whereby individual research independence classifications are not routinely communicated to staff, to reduce the risk of unintended individual-level impacts or the reinforcement of existing structural inequalities.

Findings will inform training, decision-making workflows and continuous improvement of REF processes, and will be reviewed by the REF Oversight Board to maintain fairness. Even where trends

are not directly related to REF processes, insights will inform wider workplace culture and inclusion work. For confidentiality, data will continue to be aggregated at Main Panel and institutional level.

Part 4: Allocating Contracts to Units of Assessment (UoAs)

*Each contract is linked to the most appropriate disciplinary area (UoA) based on the research activity it supports. This allocation is for **volume calculations only** and does not affect which outputs can be submitted. Output allocation is managed separately based on content and disciplinary fit.*

4.1 Policies and Procedures

Criteria and evidence: Allocations to UoAs are made for each eligible contract, rather than for individuals. If a staff member holds multiple contracts (e.g. across different roles or funding streams), each contract is assessed separately and may be allocated to a different UoA. Decisions are based on the disciplinary alignment and the nature of the research activity supported by that contract.

The process operates in two stages:

- **Automatic allocations:** Where a School (or equivalent organisational unit) maps wholly to a single UoA, all associated contracts are assigned to that UoA. These allocations may be reviewed and adjusted where necessary to ensure the best disciplinary alignment of contract FTE.
- **Reviewed allocations:** Where a School (or equivalent organisational unit) contributes to more than one UoA, or where a staff member's research spans multiple disciplines, allocations are reviewed individually to ensure alignment with the most appropriate UoA(s).

Allocation decisions consider:

- **Organisational affiliation** (School, Department or equivalent) as the starting point for consistency and alignment with existing structures.
- **Job role and research focus** associated with each contract, ensuring alignment to the UoA most reflective of the work undertaken.
- **Disciplinary fit** with REF UoA descriptors (initially based on the REF 2021 structure, pending REF 2029 updates).
- **Historical UoA allocation**, where relevant.

Where staff hold multiple contracts, each is treated separately for REF purposes and may be allocated to different UoAs if this better reflects the disciplinary nature of the research. This ensures volume calculations accurately represent research activity across the institution.

Evidence sources include, but are not limited to:

- HR contract data from MyERP.
- Research activity records (e.g. project involvement, publications, grant data).
- Input from UoA Coordinators and Heads of School.

Note: HESA cost centres are not used for UoA allocation as they do not reliably reflect disciplinary boundaries or research activity.

Decision-making and Communication

Contract allocation decisions are based on a structured review process that brings together HR data, research activity information and local academic expertise. The University REF Team coordinates the collation and analysis of contract data and makes initial allocation recommendations on a periodic basis. These recommendations are reviewed and verified by UoA Coordinators and Heads of School to ensure disciplinary alignment and consistency. Final allocation decisions are recommended by the Faculty REF Boards for approval by the REF Oversight Board.

In keeping with the University's principle that REF volume-measure decisions are at the level of contracts, allocation outcomes are not communicated to individual members of staff. Instead, information about the process, criteria and timelines for contract-to-UoA allocation is made available through the [REF SharePoint site](#). This ensures transparency and accountability without personalising or attributing REF decisions to individuals. The allocation of contract FTE to UoAs is undertaken solely for the purpose of calculating the REF volume measure and has no bearing on the assignment of research outputs, which are allocated separately based on disciplinary fit and research content (see Part 5).

4.2 Staff, Committees and Training

Roles and Responsibilities

The processes for allocating contracts to UoAs operate within the REF governance framework described in Section 1.4, with clear separation between advisory and decision-making functions.

Advisory support is provided by the University REF Team, which collates and analyses contract data and makes initial recommendations on UoA allocation. Faculty REF Managers provide guidance on allocation principles and support local implementation, while School Managers support data validation and advise on alignment between contracts, research activity and disciplinary location.

Decision-making responsibility for UoA allocation sits with academic and governance roles. UoA Coordinators and Heads of School review and verify allocations based on disciplinary alignment and research activity. Faculty REF Directors provide strategic oversight of allocation decisions within their Faculties. Faculty REF Boards recommend final UoA allocations for approval, and the REF Oversight Board approves final allocations to ensure consistency across the institution.

Training

Staff involved in reviewing or approving UoA allocations are required to complete institutional training covering responsible research assessment, the consistent application of allocation criteria and the avoidance of bias in decision-making. Training materials are reviewed regularly and updated as required. Core training is delivered through the University's Develop system, enabling monitoring of completion.

4.3 Appeals

Decisions regarding the allocation of contract FTE to UoAs are not subject to appeal. These allocations are made at the contract level for the sole purpose of calculating the REF volume measure and have no bearing on individual staff members or the eligibility and UoA assignment of outputs. Contract-to-UoA allocation may be updated where changes to contract responsibilities, organisational location or disciplinary alignment mean that the original allocation no longer appropriately reflects the nature of the research activity supported.

Staff may request access to information regarding the UoA allocation of their contract(s) for interest or clarification. However, these allocations are determined through a structured institutional process and are not open to individual challenge.

Any concerns about the use or interpretation of UoA allocation beyond its intended purpose may be raised with the University REF Team (ref-help@bristol.ac.uk) and will be treated confidentially. These concerns will be reviewed in line with the University's commitment to responsible research assessment and fair treatment of staff.

In addition to the University's internal processes, the UK Funding Bodies operate a formal complaints mechanism for individuals who believe an institution has not adhered to its approved CoP. Where a complaint is upheld, corrective action may be applied to the submission. Full details of this process will be published by the Funding Bodies on the [REF 2029 website](#) in due course.

4.4 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

EIA is embedded within the process for allocating contracts to Units of Assessment to ensure that the allocation process is applied in a fair, transparent and consistent manner and does not result in disproportionate impacts across protected characteristics. The assessment focuses on identifying and mitigating any unintended bias in how contracts are reviewed and assigned, while keeping monitoring proportionate to the limited areas of discretion within this process. As most allocations follow established organisational structures (for example, School-to-UoA mappings), equality risk is assessed as minimal. Monitoring therefore focuses on reviewed allocations only, where judgement is applied to determine the most appropriate UoA based on research focus, role profile or disciplinary alignment.

A proportionate EIA has been undertaken in line with the University's EIA guidance and is provided in Annex A. Subsequent annual updates will be made available to staff via the [REF SharePoint site](#). To minimise unintended consequences for staff, all personal and demographic information used in allocation monitoring is handled confidentially and shared only where necessary, using anonymised or aggregated formats wherever appropriate. This ensures that REF-related data is used solely for its intended purpose and does not adversely affect individual staff.

Evidence Base and Analyses

Using 2024–25 MyERP data, the following analyses were undertaken:

- Demographic comparison of contracts subject to reviewed allocation with those automatically allocated.
- Examination of reviewed allocation status by contract type (for example, part-time, fixed-term).
- Qualitative review of reviewed allocations to understand the types of cases requiring judgement and to identify any emerging issues related to consistency or fairness.

Because the number of reviewed allocations was small and unevenly distributed across UoAs, data were aggregated at institutional level to identify broad patterns. All analyses involving personal or demographic data followed the [HESA Standard Rounding Methodology](#) to protect confidentiality and ensure compliance with data protection legislation and sector best practice. These analyses will be repeated annually to monitor demographic patterns within reviewed allocations and to identify any trends requiring action.

High-level Findings

Analysis undertaken to date does not indicate that the reviewed allocation process has a disproportionate or adverse impact across protected characteristics. Reviewed allocations account for a small proportion of contracts and occur primarily in cases involving interdisciplinary roles, multiple contracts or cross-disciplinary responsibilities. Decisions were found to be based entirely on disciplinary alignment and role profile, with no evidence of differential impact related to protected characteristics.

Findings will inform training, decision-making workflows and continuous improvement of REF processes and will be reviewed by the REF Oversight Board to maintain fairness. Even where trends are not directly related to REF processes, insights will inform wider workplace culture and inclusion work. For confidentiality, data will continue to be aggregated at Main Panel and institutional level.

The initial EIA is provided in Annex A. Subsequent annual updates will be made available to staff via the [REF SharePoint site](#).

Part 5: Selecting outputs

*Outputs are chosen to showcase the highest-quality research within each UoA, while reflecting the diversity of work undertaken. Selection follows the University's principles of responsible research assessment, using expert peer review and valuing a wide range of output types. Output selection does **not** constitute an assessment of individual performance and is not subject to appeal.*

5.1 Policies and Procedures

Identifying potentially eligible outputs: To ensure comprehensive coverage and fairness, outputs will be identified through multiple routes. This includes, but is not limited to:

- **Staff nomination:** UoAs invite staff on eligible contracts to nominate outputs for review.
- **Supplementary identification:** The University REF Team will compile lists of potentially eligible outputs using institutional systems (e.g. Pure) and bibliometric tools (e.g. Scopus, OpenAlex). These lists will be shared with UoAs to complement local nomination processes.
- **Internal communications:** Periodic calls will invite any staff member on an eligible contract with an expectation of research in their role (excluding categories not eligible for REF output submission) to notify the REF Team of outputs they have produced that may be considered for submission.

These measures are designed to reduce reliance on nomination alone and mitigate equality risks by ensuring outputs from all eligible roles are considered. They also provide a mechanism for staff who may not be routinely engaged in UoA-level processes to ensure their outputs are visible for review.

Identifying substantive link to outputs: The University will establish a substantive link between each research output and the institution through verification of an associated staff member's employment relationship. A substantive link is demonstrated where an individual held an eligible employment relationship of at least 0.2 FTE for a continuous period of 12 months, and the role included an explicit expectation of research activity as defined for REF. This expectation may include roles that undertake, enable or support research activity, such as technical or specialist positions. The attributed staff member must have held an eligible employment relationship either at the time the output was published or during the period before publication, when the underpinning research was conducted. For most

outputs, this period is up to two years prior to publication; for long-form or extended-process outputs, it extends to five years.

As an exception, outputs that involve a long-form or extended process of creation (such as scholarly monographs or major creative works) may be eligible even where the eligible employment relationship occurs after the date of first publication or public dissemination. This exception is permitted to accommodate outputs with extended development timelines. The University will apply this exception strictly in line with REF requirements and will maintain an auditable record of any outputs submitted under this provision. All such cases will be reviewed by the University REF Team and approved by the REF Oversight Board before inclusion in the submission.

Outputs solely authored by staff on Pathway 3 (Teaching-only – ACEMPFUN 1), postgraduate research students, visiting or honorary staff or those on contracts without an explicit research expectation are not eligible for submission. In exceptional cases, the University may request approval from the UK REF Director to include outputs from staff on Pathway 3 (Teaching-only – ACEMPFUN 1), honorary emeritus, or those on other non-research contracts, where there is clear evidence of allocated time and funding for research. Staff on Pathway 3 contracts who believe that research is an agreed and substantive expectation of their role, and that their outputs can therefore be considered, should contact ref-help@bristol.ac.uk in the first instance. Any such cases will be considered through a consistent, centrally overseen process to ensure fairness and parity of treatment across all UoAs.

Outputs authored while an individual was on an excluded contract (e.g. Pathway 3) may be eligible for submission if the individual moves, without a break in employment, to a Pathway 1 (teaching and research) or Pathway 2 (research-only) contract during the REF period, provided they meet the other criteria for an eligible employment relationship (normally a minimum of 12 months' employment at 0.2 FTE or above in a role that has an explicit expectation of research activity). Such changes in Pathway or role will normally arise through appointment to an advertised post, subject to the University's recruitment and promotion procedures.³

It should be noted that the definition of an eligible employment relationship for the purposes of output linking differs from that used to determine the volume measure. An individual may therefore have a substantive link to an output without meeting the criteria for research independence, as independence is not a requirement for output attribution.

Outputs linked to former staff: Outputs associated with former staff may be included if a substantive link within the REF period can be verified. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Voluntary redundancy or severance.
- Retirement.
- The natural expiry of a fixed-term contract or the end of fixed-term funding associated with a permanent contract.
- Compulsory redundancy, where the output was published before the individual's departure and a substantive link to the institution can be confirmed.

³ Movement from one academic contract Pathway to another (including from Pathway 3 to Pathway 1 or Pathway 2) is described in the University of Bristol's academic pathways guidance, which explains that movement will normally be subject to the competencies required for the new pathway and applicable recruitment and promotion procedures (see [Movement between Pathways guidance](#)).

- Resignation to take up employment elsewhere.

Outputs will not be submitted where either of the following apply:

- Compulsory redundancy, where the output was published after the individual's departure.
- Submitting the output would cause significant harm, distress or reputational damage, for example where inclusion would be inappropriate due to sensitive circumstances affecting the individual or others. All such cases will be reviewed by the University REF Team, with HR advice as required, and final decisions will be taken by the REF Oversight Board.

Assigning outputs to UoAs: Outputs will be assigned to the most appropriate UoA based on disciplinary fit, using REF 2021 descriptors until REF 2029 guidance is available. Interdisciplinary outputs will be supported through collaborative decision-making between UoA Coordinators to ensure fair consideration. Where appropriate, an output may be submitted to multiple UoAs, guided by disciplinary advice and strategic alignment. The assignment of contract FTE to UoAs for the REF volume measure is entirely separate from, and has no bearing on, the allocation of outputs to UoAs.

Open Access compliance: In-scope outputs (journal articles and conference contributions with an ISSN) must comply with the [REF 2029 Open Access policy](#). For items published 2021–2025, REF 2021 OA rules apply; for 2026–2028, the updated REF 2029 OA rules (including shortened embargo periods and licensing preferences) apply. The University will monitor OA compliance and provide guidance via Library Services and the [REF SharePoint site](#).

Languages and equitable treatment: The University will not treat outputs less favourably in assessment and selection on the basis of language. This includes outputs produced in British Sign Language (BSL) and Welsh, which will be considered on an equivalent basis to outputs produced in English. Processes for identifying potentially eligible outputs are designed to encourage the consideration of all eligible, high-quality outputs irrespective of language, format or mode of dissemination and will operate on an equivalent basis to support fair consideration of outputs produced in BSL or Welsh where these arise.

Where outputs produced in BSL or Welsh are considered as part of internal review, calibration or submission preparation, the University will seek to ensure that appropriate expertise is available to support fair, informed and unbiased assessment. Outputs will normally be considered in their original form and assessment will remain focused on the quality of the research contribution rather than the language or format through which, the research is communicated. Where appropriate to support internal review processes, contextual or supporting information may be used to facilitate review, but this will not itself form part of the assessment judgement.

Diversity of outputs: The University encourages the inclusion of a wide range of output types (as appropriate to the academic discipline of each UoA), including but not limited to journal articles, books, datasets, software, creative works and policy reports. Internal guidance promotes equitable recognition of diverse research contributions across disciplines and formats.

Ensuring submissions reflect the research undertaken: Output selection will focus on showcasing the highest quality research within each UoA, while ensuring that submissions provide a fair and accurate representation of the research undertaken during the REF period. Selection will be informed by an understanding of the scale, shape and development of the UoA's research activity over time.

In developing output pools, UoAs will consider the breadth and distinctiveness of their research, including thematic, methodological and disciplinary range, patterns of collaboration (including interdisciplinary and external partnerships), and the diversity of output types appropriate to the field. Output selection will also take account of the UoA's research strategy and structures, including how different strands of activity contribute to the overall research profile of the submitting unit.

Although REF focuses on showcasing the highest-quality outputs, UoAs are expected to avoid approaches that disproportionately privilege particular topics, methodologies, output formats or groups of researchers where this would result in a misleading or incomplete representation of the unit's research activity. Decisions will be grounded in expert peer review and moderation, rather than numerical targets or quotas.

UoAs will document how their output submission and any associated reserve list represent the range and diversity of research activity, output types and strategic priorities within the UoA, and how output selection decisions support both research quality and the coherent representation of the unit's research profile. This documentation will support the Unit-level Statement of Representation, which forms part of the Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE) element of the submission.

In demonstrating representativeness, UoAs will consider how submitted outputs are distributed across the staff HESA IDs used to evidence a substantive link to the institution. Where more than five outputs are attributed to a single ID, UoAs will be expected to explain how the submission remains a fair and balanced representation of the unit's research activity, rather than being unduly shaped by a narrow subset of contributors. This indicative maximum limits how many submitted outputs can be attributed to a single HESA staff ID but does not limit how many outputs a member of staff may have contributed to.

Exact selection processes and approaches to evidencing representativeness will vary by UoA to reflect disciplinary norms. Further guidance and support are available from the University REF Team at ref-help@bristol.ac.uk.

Policies and procedures and responsible research assessment practice: Responsible research assessment principles are applied not only to the evaluation of individual outputs, but also to the composition of output submissions, supporting balanced and coherent representation of research activity within each UoA.

All output selection processes are underpinned by the University's [Statement on Responsible Research Assessment](#) and REF 2029 Code of Practice module: Process for robust and responsible assessment of research outputs (available in Annex F). These documents set out the principles and expectations for fair, transparent and context-sensitive evaluation, including:

- Peer review as the primary method of assessment, supported by the responsible and contextual use of indicators.
- Non-reliance on journal-based metrics as proxies for research quality.
- Inclusivity across career stages, roles and output types.
- Transparency and documentation of local review and calibration processes.
- Use of AI or emerging tools only where approved and in support of expert judgement, and in line with University policy and guidance.

In support of these principles, UoAs are required to document their local output review and selection processes using the institutional Output Review Pro Forma. The pro forma provides a structured record of how outputs are identified, reviewed and assessed; how reviewers are selected and trained; how calibration and moderation are incorporated into the process; how conflicts of interest are managed; and how considerations of representativeness and responsible research assessment are addressed in practice.

5.2 Staff, Committees and Training

Roles and Responsibilities

The processes for nominating, reviewing and selecting outputs operate within the REF governance framework described in Section 1.4. Responsibilities span advisory and decision-making roles at UoA, Faculty and institutional level, with clear separation between review, moderation, oversight and approval functions.

UoA Coordinators lead the output selection process within their disciplines. They are responsible for organising output reviews, overseeing calibration, moderating assessments to ensure consistency in the application of REF criteria, and resolving divergent reviews. Where appropriate, UoA Coordinators are supported by advisory review groups or panels that provide additional subject expertise to inform assessment.

Advisory support is provided by Faculty REF Directors and the University REF Team, who offer guidance, advice and practical support to ensure that review and moderation processes are fair, well-documented and aligned with institutional policy and responsible research assessment principles.

Decision-making responsibility is exercised through governance structures. UoA Committees review moderated assessment outcomes and propose an output pool for submission. Faculty REF Boards approve the proposed output pool and provide Faculty-level assurance. The REF Oversight Board provides final ratification of output selections to ensure institutional consistency, transparency and accountability.

Training

Staff involved in output review and selection are required to complete institutional training covering responsible research assessment, application of the REF assessment criteria (originality, significance and rigour), consistent peer review practice and the avoidance of bias in assessment. Training materials are reviewed regularly and updated as required. Core training is delivered through the University's Develop system, enabling monitoring of completion.

5.3 Appeals

Decisions regarding the selection of research outputs for submission to REF 2029 are not subject to individual appeal. Output selection decisions are made at the UoA level through structured review and governance processes designed to ensure fairness across the University.

Output selection has no bearing on individual staff performance or recognition and does not confer advantage or disadvantage. The process operates at the institutional level to ensure that submissions collectively reflect the quality and breadth of research undertaken within each UoA. Details of outputs selected for submission will not be shared outside the formal REF governance process. This approach

maintains the integrity of institutional decision-making and prevents premature or individualised interpretation of selection outcomes.

Staff may request clarification on how the output review and selection process has been applied within their disciplinary area(s) or raise any concerns about the fairness or conduct of the process, by contacting the University REF Team at ref-help@bristol.ac.uk. All such enquiries and concerns will be treated confidentially and reviewed in line with the University's commitment to responsible research assessment and the fair treatment of staff. In addition, the UK Funding Bodies operate a formal complaints mechanism for individuals who believe an institution has not adhered to its approved CoP. Where a complaint is upheld, corrective action may be applied to the submission. Full details of this process will be published by the Funding Bodies on the [REF 2029 website](#) in due course.

5.4 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

EIA is embedded throughout the output selection process to ensure that it is designed and governed in a fair, transparent and inclusive way. This includes output identification, nomination, review and selection, and is intended to support submissions that reflect the diversity of research undertaken and the diversity of researchers contributing to it, without resulting in disproportionate impacts across protected characteristics. In particular, equality risk is mitigated by identifying potentially eligible outputs through multiple routes, rather than relying solely on staff nomination. This is intended to support comprehensive coverage of eligible research activity and to reduce the risk that outputs from certain roles, career stages or groups are overlooked.

A proportionate EIA has been undertaken in line with the University's EIA guidance and is provided in Annex A. Subsequent annual updates will be made available to staff via the [REF SharePoint site](#). To minimise the risk of unintended consequences for staff, all personal and demographic information used in monitoring output selection processes is handled confidentially and shared only where necessary, using anonymised or aggregated formats wherever appropriate. This ensures that REF-related data is used solely for its intended purpose and does not adversely affect individual staff.

Evidence Base and Analyses

Analyses will be undertaken at the end of the 2025–26 academic year, once a full cycle of output review has been completed and the required datasets are available. The necessary information, including output-level data and substantive links using HESA IDs, will only become available once the output review process has been fully implemented in Pure. Annual analyses will follow to monitor participation, representation and any emerging trends over the REF period.

Using MyERP HR data, HESA staff records and output review records, the following analyses will be undertaken annually:

- Demographic comparison of staff who nominated outputs for review with the wider academic staff population, using HESA IDs for substantive links, to ensure that output nomination processes are equitable and do not result in disproportionate impacts across protected characteristics.
- Examination of reviewer participation, using anonymised demographic information linked to UoA reviewer lists, to identify any patterns or equality-related considerations in the demographic profile of reviewers who are assigning grades to outputs proposed for submission.

- Examination of output types and disciplinary coverage within the selection pool to identify any structural disparities in the range and diversity of output forms included in the reviewed pool.
- Examination of the demographics of staff whose outputs are added to the selection pool, using the HESA ID associated with the substantive link, to identify any disproportionate representation of staff with protected characteristics among those whose outputs are prioritised for submission.
- Qualitative review of output nomination and selection patterns to understand where judgement is applied and to identify any emerging issues related to consistency or fairness.

Because data will vary in volume and distribution across UoAs, all analyses will be aggregated at Main Panel and institutional level to identify broad patterns while protecting confidentiality. All analyses involving personal or demographic data will follow the [HESA Standard Rounding Methodology](#) to reduce the risk of identifying individuals and to ensure compliance with data protection legislation and sector best practice.

High-level Findings (Provisional)

Review of output selection processes undertaken as part of the EIA indicates that current practices in some UoAs continue to reflect approaches developed under earlier REF frameworks, including a focus on a subset of the research community and a limited range of output types. This reflects legacy eligibility arrangements rather than features of the REF 2029 framework itself.

At this stage, no evidence has been identified to suggest that the design or governance of the output selection process introduces disadvantage for staff with protected characteristics. The process includes safeguards intended to promote fairness, consistency and inclusivity. Further quantitative analysis will be undertaken following completion of the first full cycle of output review, as set out above, to assess participation and outcomes in practice.

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REF Code of Practice Equality Impact Assessment

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

This Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken in line with the University of Bristol's EIA framework and guidance. This framework supports compliance with the legal responsibility to demonstrate that action is being taken to promote equality and protect free speech in policy design, decision-making and review. This EIA applies proportionate monitoring and mitigation measures, consistent with statutory guidance, to demonstrate due regard to equality requirements. In addition to process-specific analysis, diversity monitoring of committee membership (REF Oversight Board, Faculty REF Boards and UoA Committees) is embedded within the REF governance framework to ensure that a broad range of perspectives inform decision-making.

The Bristol framework promotes a proportionate, evidence-led and iterative approach. It focuses on identifying whether policies or processes may result in differential impacts across protected characteristics, understanding the reasons for any such differences, and taking reasonable steps to prevent unintended disadvantage while advancing equality of opportunity. The framework also goes further by considering factors beyond protected characteristics, such as part-time working, and by applying an intersectional lens to understand how combined characteristics may compound disadvantage. In keeping with this approach, this EIA is not a one-off exercise but forms part of an ongoing cycle of monitoring, reflection and improvement across the REF 2029 period.

This EIA is presented as a single, integrated assessment covering multiple REF processes. While analyses and findings are reported by process for clarity, common principles, evidence sources, data limitations, governance arrangements and monitoring approaches apply across all sections and are not repeated in full.

1.2 Scope and approach

The EIA covers the key REF processes set out in the REF Code of Practice: determining research independence, allocating contracts to Units of Assessment (UoAs), and selecting outputs for submission. It provides assurance equality and academic freedom of expression are embedded throughout the REF cycle and that the University's approach to REF 2029 is aligned with its wider commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion, promoting freedom of speech, responsible research assessment and transparent governance.

All protected characteristics have been considered, including age, sex, gender reassignment, disability, race and sexual orientation, alongside other relevant factors such as part-time working. The analysis draws on available quantitative and qualitative evidence, taking account of data limitations and small-number effects. Where characteristic-specific commentary is provided, this reflects the identification of patterns warranting further examination or explanation. Where no such commentary is included, this reflects the absence of identified impact based on available evidence rather than an absence of consideration.

Consistent with institutional guidance and REF best practice, this EIA:

- is integrated into REF processes by design, rather than applied retrospectively.
- focuses on contract-level and process-level decisions.
- draws on quantitative and qualitative evidence while acknowledging data limitations.
- applies proportionate scrutiny, with greater focus where judgement or discretion is exercised.
- commits to regular review and transparency, with findings informing guidance, training and governance oversight.

2. Process for determining research independence

2.1 Purpose of the assessment

This section of the EIA considers the University's process for determining research independence for Pathway 2 contracts (Research-Only - ACEMPFUN 2), as set out in Part 3 of the REF 2029 Code of Practice. The purpose of the assessment is to ensure that the process operates fairly, transparently and consistently, and does not result in unintended adverse impacts across protected characteristics.

Research independence is assessed based on whether a contract and the associated role confer independence, rather than on who holds the contract, and is used solely to calculate the REF volume measure. They do not affect output eligibility, career progression or performance assessment. This assessment provides assurance that the application of independence criteria complies with the Public Sector Equality Duty and aligns with the University's EDI commitments.

2.2 Scope

This assessment applies to:

- all Pathway 2 contracts (Research-Only - ACEMPFUN 2) subject to research independence determination.
- Pathway 1 contracts (Teaching and Research - ACEMPFUN 3), included for comparative analysis.

The assessment focuses on contracts and the processes applied to them. Demographic analysis is undertaken in relation to the staff holding those contracts, using available diversity data, to identify whether the application of the process results in differential patterns across protected characteristics.

All protected characteristics and other relevant factors were considered in line with the approach set out in Section 1.2, including how they may interact. Commentary is provided only where patterns were identified that warranted further examination.

2.3 Evidence base

The assessment draws on:

- HESA Staff Return data (2024–25 and subsequent years).
- HR contract data held in MyERP.
- REF independence determinations and indicator classifications.
- Institutional diversity monitoring data.

Data limitations:

HESA Rounding Methodology suppresses small values, limiting meaningful analysis at UoA level. Analysis is therefore undertaken at institutional and Main Panel levels.

2.4 Analyses

Analyses undertaken (2024–25) include:

- demographic comparison of Pathway 2 contracts classified as independent and not independent.
- examination of independence status by protected characteristics and contract type.
- comparison of representation between Pathway 2 and Pathway 1 contracts.
- analysis of indicator-based pools, comparing contracts meeting independence indicators with those not meeting indicators.

Key findings:

Research independence status by grade and pathway

Classification as independent is closely linked to seniority within Pathway 2 contracts. This reflects the purpose of the process and is important context for interpreting demographic patterns.

Race

Staff from global majority backgrounds are represented at a lower proportion in the volume measure than in the overall eligible population. Differences are not statistically significant and reflect existing grade distributions within research-only contracts rather than impacts arising from the independence determination process.

Sex

Female staff are under-represented in the volume measure relative to the overall eligible population. Differences are not statistically significant. At Grades J and K, where funding-related indicators are applied, male staff are more frequently classified as independent. This appears to reflect wider gendered patterns in research funding rather than bias in the application of criteria.

2.5 Assessment of impact

Actual impacts identified

No disproportionate or adverse impacts arising from the research independence determination process were identified. Observed differences reflect existing patterns of inequality in seniority within research-only contracts rather than process-driven effects.

Potential risks

The use of funding-related indicators at certain grades may reflect wider patterns of inequality in research funding. This risk will continue to be monitored.

2.6 Mitigation and enhancement

No disproportionate impacts have been identified. The process has been designed to mitigate equality risks through clear criteria, consistent application and governance oversight.

Individual research independence outcomes are not communicated to staff. Determinations are applied solely for technical REF purposes and do not reflect research quality or institutional value.

Communicating individual outcomes could risk reinforcing structural inequalities or informal perceptions of merit.

Transparency is maintained through published criteria, documented decision-making and aggregated monitoring.

2.7 Monitoring and review

Analyses will be repeated annually and reviewed by the REF Oversight Board. Findings will inform guidance, training and governance oversight and will contribute to broader institutional understanding where structural inequalities are identified.

3. Process for allocating contracts to Units of Assessment (UoAs)

3.1 Purpose of the assessment

This section considers the process for allocating contracts to UoAs for REF volume measure purposes, as set out in Part 4 of the Code of Practice. Allocations are applied at the level of contracts and used solely to determine the appropriate UoA.

3.2 Scope

This assessment applies to:

- contracts subject to reviewed allocation.
- contracts allocated automatically (for comparative analysis).

The assessment focuses on contracts and the allocation process applied to them. Demographic analysis is undertaken in relation to the staff holding those contracts, using available diversity data, to identify whether the application of the process results in differential patterns across protected characteristics.

All protected characteristics and other relevant factors were considered in line with the approach set out in Section 1.2, including how they may interact. Commentary is provided only where patterns were identified that warranted further examination.

3.3 Evidence base

- HESA Staff Return data (2024–25 and subsequent years).
- HR contract data held in MyERP.
- Institutional diversity monitoring data.

Data limitations:

Reviewed allocations represent a small number of contracts. Analysis is undertaken at institutional level.

3.4 Analyses

- comparison of reviewed and automatic allocation by protected characteristics.
- examination by contract type.
- qualitative review of reviewed allocation decisions to understand where judgement is applied and to assess consistency.

3.5 Key findings

Reviewed allocations arise primarily in interdisciplinary or multi-role contexts. No consistent patterns of disproportionate representation by protected characteristic were identified. Qualitative review confirmed decisions were grounded in disciplinary alignment.

3.6 Assessment of impact

Actual impacts identified

No disproportionate or adverse impacts were identified.

Potential risks:

Perceptions of subjectivity in individual cases are mitigated through clear principles and documentation.

3.7 Mitigation and enhancement

The process limits reviewed allocations to cases where judgement is required and applies documented principles and governance oversight. Any refinements will be proportionate and reviewed through REF governance.

3.8 Monitoring and review

Annual monitoring will be undertaken, with findings reviewed by the REF Oversight Board and shared through appropriate governance routes where structural patterns are identified.

4. Process for selecting outputs

4.1 Purpose of the assessment

This section considers the process for nominating, reviewing and selecting outputs for REF 2029. Output selection is applied to outputs rather than individuals and is designed to reflect the breadth and diversity of research undertaken.

4.2 Scope

This assessment applies to:

- outputs identified and nominated for review.
- reviewers involved in assessment.
- outputs included in the selection pool.

Protected characteristics and other relevant factors were considered in line with Section 1.2. Detailed demographic analysis will follow completion of a full review cycle.

4.3 Evidence base

- institutional guidance on responsible assessment of research outputs.
- UoA output review plans and pro formas.
- reviewer training materials.
- governance arrangements.
- early implementation experience.

4.4 Provisional assessment of process design and governance

Initial review indicates that some UoA-level practices reflect historic REF approaches focused on a subset of the research community and limited output types. While understandable, this highlights opportunities to refine practice in line with REF 2029, which decouples output eligibility from the volume measure.

To support inclusive practice, the University is developing supplementary processes to identify potentially eligible outputs using tools such as Pure, Scopus and OpenAlex, alongside disciplinary judgement.

Safeguards supporting fairness and inclusion include:

- clear guidance emphasising assessment of outputs rather than individuals.
- structured criteria and moderation.
- mandatory reviewer training.
- separation from performance management.
- multi-level governance oversight.

4.5 Current position and data availability

A full cycle of output review has not yet been completed. This assessment is therefore provisional and will be supplemented by quantitative analysis once stable datasets are available.

4.6 Analyses

From the end of the 2025–26 academic year, analyses will include:

- demographic comparison of staff nominating outputs for review with the wider academic staff population (combined Pathway 1 and Pathway 2).
- examination of reviewer participation, using anonymised demographic data linked to reviewer lists, to identify any patterns or equality considerations.
- examination of output types and disciplinary coverage within the selection pool.
- examination of the demographics of staff whose outputs are included in the selection pool, using HESA records associated with substantive connection.
- qualitative review of output nomination and selection patterns to understand where judgement is applied and to assess consistency.

4.7 Assessment of impact

Actual impacts identified

No evidence has been identified at this stage to suggest disadvantage arising from process design or governance.

Potential risks

Patterns may reflect wider structural inequalities or transitional practices. These will be assessed once full data are available.

4.8 Mitigation and enhancement

Enhancements include:

- supplementary output identification routes.
- targeted communications to support inclusive nomination.
- monitoring of outputs identified via different routes.
- Refinement of training and guidance.
- ongoing governance review.

4.9 Monitoring and review

Full equality analysis will be undertaken following the first complete review cycle and repeated annually. Findings will inform guidance, training and governance oversight and be reviewed by the REF Oversight Board.

Annex B

REF Governance Framework diagrams

Figure 1: REF committee structure

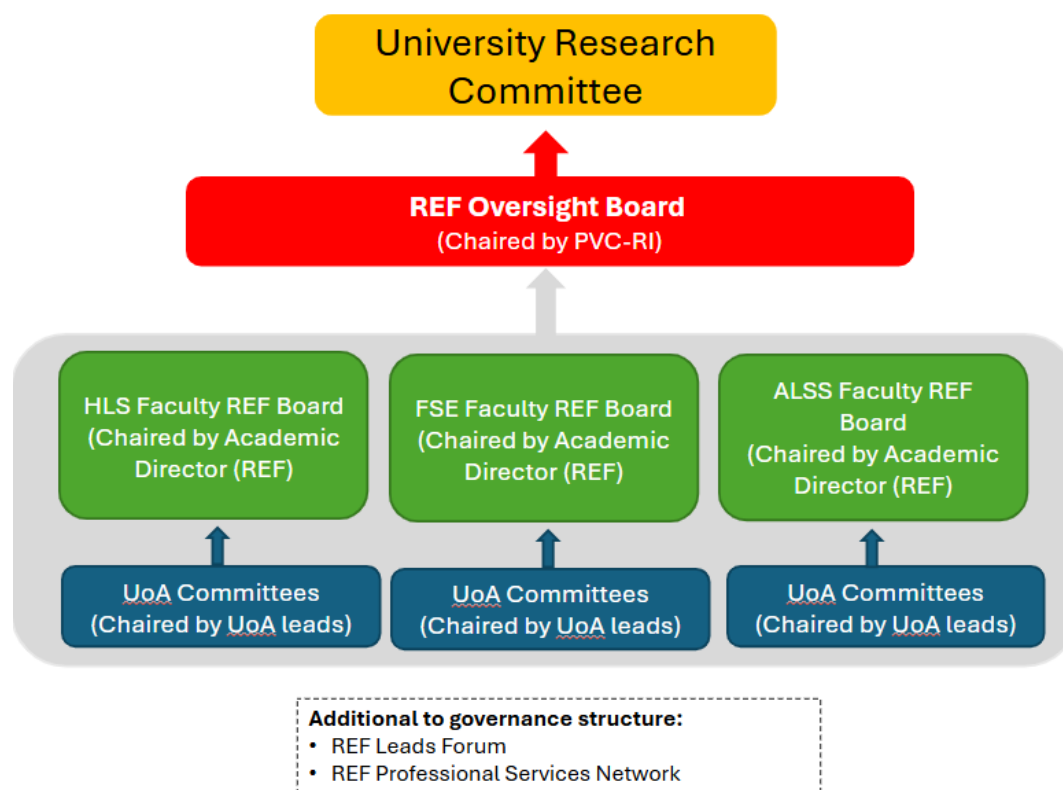


Figure 2: University REF Team



Annex C

Pathway 2 Academic Staff Role Profiles⁴

Background

Pathway 2 comprises five role profiles. They set out the levels of contribution by academic staff whose roles are focused wholly or mainly on research-related activity.

These role profiles were developed locally in consultation with the AUT (now UCU) and the research community within the University, and were based on models offered at the time by Hay, the AUT (now UCU) and the JNCHES national role profiles. The profiles have been subject to minor updating from time to time to reflect more general changes in academia, language, etc. but have not been fundamentally changed.

There are separate role profiles for staff whose roles are focused on both teaching and research (Pathway 1) or on teaching and scholarship (Pathway 3).

Each level within the researcher role profiles subsumes the competencies of any lower levels. These profiles set out, first, the general qualifications and experiences needed for entry into a particular level and, second, the generic competences and responsibilities expected of role holders at each level. It is unlikely that any single member of staff will be applying all these competencies at any one time but he or she would be expected to display most of them over a period of time. It is also recognised that the complex nature of the University means that not all these descriptors are necessarily relevant to researchers in every School.

Care must be taken by academic managers to ensure quality of opportunity in relation to the allocation of opportunities and responsibilities to ensure that the appropriate competences and experience can be acquired for movement to the appropriate higher level post.

The appropriate form of research output will differ from discipline to discipline, encompassing writing software to writing substantial monographs. In some disciplines, high quality research may involve the collection of disparate published materials, and then systematically and analytically reviewing them; in others intellectual property may be protected through patents.

Research Associate (Grade I)

Role Summary

1. Role holders at this level will be working under supervision/direction from a more experienced researcher, who will be ultimately responsible for the project.
2. They will draw on their experience of postgraduate research or equivalent work experience to conduct studies which contribute to the research work of an individual research leader or team.
3. They will generally be involved in data generation and/or collection using standard and well-defined methods developed by others or developed by them with support/direction from an experienced colleague.

⁴ These role profiles are reproduced from the publicly available version on the University website: <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/hr/grading/academic/role-profiles/>.

4. Role holders will be provided with academic (including guidance on realistic career opportunities) and pastoral support within the School and training will be available designed to develop their competencies and ability to take on a wider range of responsibilities.

Qualifications, skills and experience needed for appointment at Level A

1. A good honours degree (or equivalent) with subject knowledge in the relevant area and some research experience.
2. A relevant postgraduate research degree or equivalent professional qualification/experience or be working towards one.
3. Sufficient breadth and depth of specialist knowledge in the discipline to work within their own area.
4. Well-developed analytical skills.
5. Ability to communicate complex information clearly, both orally and through the written word.
6. Ability to work collaboratively with colleagues and students.
7. Ability to use initiative, and apply creativity, to solve problems that are encountered in the research context.
8. Ability to organise their own time and work, to meet deadlines, and manage competing priorities.

Responsibilities

1. Contribute effectively to the research programme of the School under the guidance of a more experienced academic Principal Investigator.
2. Use their initiative and creativity to analyse and interpret research data and draw conclusions on the outcomes.
3. Co-ordinate their own work with that of others, deal with problems which may affect the achievement of research objectives and contribute to the planning of the project(s).
4. Present information on research progress and outcomes to groups overseeing the research project and in wider School-based fora such as research seminars.
5. Write up results from their own research activity and contribute to the research project's dissemination, in whatever form (report, papers, chapters, book, conference posters and presentations).
6. Ensure that personal knowledge in relevant fields of study is kept up to date.
7. May participate in activities to achieve engagement with research and/or impact beyond academia.
8. Use research resources (including, where required, laboratories, workshops and specialist equipment) appropriately.
9. Maintain academic standards and freedom, and work in accordance with University policies (e.g. equal opportunities, ethics, health and safety policies).
10. May provide advice and demonstrate techniques to students in their discipline.
11. Undertake relevant training and development activities to develop capacity for taking on wider responsibilities (including small amounts of teaching) and to support their career development.

12. Engage effectively in the University's Staff Review and Development process and develop, with advice, an awareness of their own professional development needs and a personal development strategy, engaging with continuing professional development appropriate to the role.
13. Consistently act as a good citizen, actively participating fully in the daily working life of the School.

Relationships and Contacts

1. Will be managed, advised and assisted by a more experienced academic or Principal Investigator.
2. May work with other researchers in a team and actively participate in the work of the team.
3. Will liaise with research colleagues and support staff on day-to-day issues.
4. May provide help and guidance as required to any support staff and/or research students assisting with the research.
5. May act as a research staff representative, sitting on the University Research Staff Reps committee and attending School staff meetings as well as acting as a point of contact for other researchers in their school.
6. Will be starting to develop internal and external contacts with researchers in related areas of study, in order to assist the work of their research project(s).

Senior Research Associate (Grade J)

This profile assumes that all the qualifications, skills and experiences required of a Level A researcher have been acquired. It also assumes that the responsibilities of a Level A researcher will have been fulfilled satisfactorily. Only the additional requirements are spelled out below

Role Summary

1. Role holders at this level will be experienced, professional researchers and subject specialists, drawing upon knowledge gained from postgraduate research and/or working within a Level A role.
2. They will be associated with a particular project (or projects) and will contribute ideas, and/or enhancement of techniques or methodologies.
3. They will be expected to do some writing for dissemination as appropriate to the role.
4. They will still be working under supervision, but they will also be expected to take significant initiatives in their work and consult with the Principal Investigator over the details of the project.
5. They may contribute to the School's teaching, through supervision of projects, overseeing practical classes, or taking small group tutorial classes.
6. They will be provided with academic and pastoral support within the School (including guidance on realistic career opportunities) and training and development activities will be available. These will be designed to develop their competencies and ability to take on a wider range of responsibilities.

Qualifications, skills and experience needed for appointment to Level B

1. A relevant postgraduate research degree or equivalent professional experience in the research area required.
2. Detailed subject knowledge in the area of research.

3. Significant previous experience of independent research (or transferable skills gained from professional or clinical experience combined with some experience or an awareness of the research environment).
4. High-level analytical skills.
5. Likelihood of advanced skills directly related to their research project.
6. Presentations at conferences and some publications in respected journals or equivalent in the field.
7. Full awareness of the ethical issues involved in their research work.
8. Ability to communicate complex information clearly, both orally and in writing.
9. Ability to stimulate and encourage the commitment to learn in others.
10. Ability to use initiative, and apply creativity, to solve problems that are encountered in the teaching and/or research context.
11. Ability to work collaboratively with colleagues and students.
12. Ability to organise their own time and work, to meet deadlines, and manage competing priorities.

Responsibilities

1. Although working under the general guidance of a more experienced academic or Principal Investigator, they will contribute ideas, including enhancements to the technical or methodological aspects of the study, to the research project, thus providing substantial 'added value'.
2. Determine and deploy appropriate methodologies for research, with advice and support.
3. Assess research findings for the need/scope for further investigations.
4. Write up their own research work for publication, with appropriate support, in respected journals or equivalent and/or contribute as a team member to larger publications.
5. Present research findings, either at conferences or seminars appropriate to the discipline.
6. Contribute to grant applications submitted by others.
7. May (consonant with the terms of their funding) contribute to the teaching of students in the School, usually within their own field of expertise and knowledge of research methods.
8. May be involved in the supervision, with guidance, of final year undergraduate/taught postgraduate research projects as well as the day-to-day supervision of PhD students.
9. May (consonant with the terms of their funding) identify personal research objectives, develop a plan for personal research and initiate research that leads to the development of knowledge and theoretical understanding.
10. Begin to write, with appropriate support, bids for individual research funding or, where funders do not permit this, contribute to the writing of collective bids.
11. Begin to referee papers for external bodies.
12. Participate effectively in activities to achieve engagement with research, and/or impact beyond academia.

13. Where the research is apposite, begin to develop entrepreneurial or collaborative links either with external organisations or with in-house companies.
14. Where appropriate, register patents to protect intellectual property.
15. Consistently act as a good citizen, actively taking on administrative duties and participating fully in the daily working life of the School, behaving as a role model for others.
16. Use research resources (including, where required, laboratories, workshops and specialist equipment) appropriately.
17. Develop an awareness of University, Faculty and School strategy and objectives, including how their role contributes to these.
18. Develop an understanding of University structures, policies and procedures and relevant issues in the higher education, research, social and political environment.
19. Maintain academic standards, academic freedom and work in accordance with University policies (e.g. regarding equal opportunities, ethics, health and safety).
20. Engage effectively in the University's Staff Review and Development process and develop, with advice, an awareness of their own professional development needs and a personal development strategy, engaging with continuing professional development appropriate to the role. This may include engagement with the University's [CREATE scheme](#) or Health Professions Education programme.

Relationships and Contacts

1. Will be line managed by a more experienced member of the School, normally the Principal Investigator.
2. May work within teams and should contribute to the academic life of the School through participation in research seminars and contribution to appropriate School meetings.
3. Will work with Professional Services staff and with students, as well as relate intellectually to other academics within their School.
4. Will be actively developing their own research network with researchers in other institutions, nationally and internationally.
5. Will communicate with users of, and communities relevant to, the research and, as appropriate, the subjects of their research.

Research Fellow (Grade K)

This profile assumes that all the qualifications, skills and experiences required of a Level B researcher have been acquired. It also assumes that the responsibilities of a Level B researcher will have been fulfilled satisfactorily. Only the additional requirements are spelled out below

Role Summary

1. Role holders at this level will have substantial experience of research.
2. They will initiate and take responsibility for some research projects and may be Principal Investigators.

3. They will be involved in administration relevant to their projects (e.g. helping to prepare bids for research funding), managing other researchers and monitoring research budgets.
4. They will be expected to undertake research individually and/or collectively and to advance the state of knowledge and understanding within their particular area of expertise.
5. They will be publishing regularly in high quality outlets.
6. They are likely to provide some teaching support for the School (consonant with the terms of their funding).
7. They will be expected to be establishing a growing reputation within their particular research field and academic discipline and to be developing and demonstrating intellectual independence.

Qualifications, skills and experience needed for appointment to Level C

1. A relevant postgraduate research degree and in-depth subject knowledge in their areas of scholarship with well-developed technical and methodological skills, and some experience in designing and delivering research projects.
2. Ability to assess and evaluate concepts/theories in order to develop original solutions and particular knowledge of, and expertise in, research methodologies appropriate to their area of scholarship.
3. Ability to provide effective leadership to small research teams.
4. Strong publication record for the discipline, showing evidence of work of national quality.
5. Ability to contribute to broader organisational and management processes and to provide leadership, co-ordinating the work of other staff, and supervising the work of research students and/or final year undergraduate projects.
6. Potential to mentor less experienced research staff successfully.

Responsibilities

1. Independently identify research objectives and potential funding sources, and write bids for funding.
2. Play a leading role in research teams to which they belong, including progressively larger and/or more complex projects, or as an individual researcher in their specific research area.
3. Play a major part in the successful dissemination of their (or the team's) research findings, presenting at conferences and contributing substantially to publications.
4. Produce publications of at least, national quality and with some evidence of potential international quality, in the quantity appropriate to the discipline.
5. Ensure intellectual rigour and adherence to ethical standards in the projects for which they are responsible.
6. Help colleagues to interpret data, to manage competing priorities, and to develop their research skills.
7. Ensure that knowledge and methodological/technical skills in their own, and related, areas of scholarship is extended and informs research activities.
8. Monitor and, where appropriate, manage research resources (e.g. time, materials, finance, laboratory space, equipment) effectively.

9. Play an effective leadership role in mentoring early career colleagues and co-ordinating the work of research and other staff.
10. Effectively supervise research students to graduation, and take responsibility for their training.
11. Participate in the selection of staff working on their own projects, take on some specific responsibilities within the School and become involved in University governance (e.g. hearing complaints from research students, representing the School on faculty committees).
12. Consistently act as a good citizen, actively taking on administrative duties and participating fully in the daily working life of the School, behaving as a role model for others.
13. Contribute (consonant with the terms of their funding) to the teaching of the School (e.g. giving lectures in their specialty, supervising final year undergraduate projects and doctoral students, taking small group classes, participating in short course teaching or workshops to update professionals).
14. Play an active part in research networks, develop contacts with external bodies including funding bodies, and actively seek out and develop opportunities for interdisciplinary research.
15. Referee grant proposals for external bodies.
16. Begin to chair sessions at conferences.
17. Contribute effectively to School meetings.
18. Contribute effectively to the development of activities to achieve engagement with research, and/or impact beyond academia.
19. Engage effectively in the University's Staff Review and Development process and develop, with advice, an awareness of their own professional development needs and a personal development strategy, engaging with continuing professional development appropriate to the role. This may include engagement with the University's [CREATE scheme](#) or Health Professions Education programme.
20. Successfully take, where appropriate, a leading role in developing entrepreneurial or collaborative links either with external organisations or with in-house companies.

Relationships and Contacts

1. Will have an identified line manager within the School.
2. May line manage research associates and/or senior research associates and will help to co-ordinate the research projects within the School.
3. May liaise with teaching staff and be responsible for other staff.
4. May be an external examiner for research students and are likely to interact with external examiners of their own students.
5. Likely to operate across the Faculty (or cognate faculties) to help build strong interdisciplinary research alongside other academic staff.

Senior Research Fellow (including the title Associate Professor) (Grade L)

This profile assumes that all the qualifications, skills and experiences required of a Level C researcher have been acquired. It also assumes that the responsibilities of a Level C researcher will have been fulfilled satisfactorily. Only the additional requirements are spelled out below.

For those applying for promotion to Associate Professor, another key requirement is that they evidence progress towards meeting the relevant professorial role profile.

Role Summary

1. Role holders at this level will have extensive experience in research and research management.
2. They will normally be Principal Investigators, leading collaborative research bids and research teams or driving forward innovative research themselves.
3. They will be involved in scholastic projects (e.g. editing journals and academic books), and be making a significant leadership and/or management contribution within their school or the wider University, and be participating in national/international academic networks and conferences.
4. They may be transferring their knowledge through some teaching and/or supervision to undergraduate or graduate students (consonant with the terms of their funding).
5. Role holders at this level will be independent researchers and will have an established national and growing international reputation within their academic discipline generally and research field in particular.

Qualifications, skills and experience needed for appointment/promotion to Level d

1. An international reputation for the quality of their research work with evidence of a clear upwards trajectory.
2. Extensive experience of successfully initiating, designing and implementing research projects.
3. Evidence of their effective support for less experienced researchers (e.g. through mentoring, group leadership, providing encouragement to others within an area of research).
4. Collaborations with scholars outside the School and University.

Responsibilities

1. Independently and proactively identify research projects to be carried out individually or with collaborative partners.
2. Take responsibility, either individually or in collaboration with others, for preparing bids for research funding.
3. Oversee and manage research projects, providing leadership, resolving disagreements within the team, and taking responsibility for their overall success.
4. Take a leading role in the international dissemination of research findings, taking primary responsibility for the writing up of research for publication and exploring opportunities to demonstrate the impact of your research.
5. Be lead author of publications that are of international quality.

6. Help to create networks of researchers and opportunities for less experienced colleagues, advising them on possible sources of research funding, providing expert advice on their projects, and generally overseeing the development of their careers.
7. Take an active role within specialist networks outside the University and contribute their expertise to the wider academic community.
8. Actively participate in the development of the School's research strategy, making a significant contribution to its research reputation and income.
9. Develop effective activities to achieve engagement with research, and/or impact beyond academia.
10. Where appropriate, take a leading role in developing entrepreneurial or collaborative links either with external organisations or with in-house companies.
11. Consistently act as a good citizen, actively taking on administrative duties and participating fully in the daily working life of the School, behaving as a role model for others.
12. Operate as a role model and contribute to the professional development of other staff.
13. Contribute effectively to School planning and development processes, including decisions on resource application.
14. Take on and deliver specific leadership roles within the School or Faculty.
15. Be knowledgeable about, and play a part in, wider University structures beyond the School (e.g. on faculty committees, membership of Senate).
16. Effectively represent the School in external relations as required.
17. Participate, as appropriate, as a subject expert in consultancy and advisory arrangements, and/or legal proceedings.
18. May undertake some teaching relevant to their specialism.
19. Engage effectively in the University's Staff Review and Development process, potentially as a reviewer as well as a reviewee, and ongoing continuing professional development. This may include engagement with the University's [CREATE scheme](#) or Health Professions Education programme.

Relationships and Contacts

1. Will have an identified line manager, normally the Head of School (or Primary Unit).
2. Will have direct line management responsibility for some research staff, and often some technical/professional services staff, and will often be responsible for their Staff Review and Development and may be involved in disciplinary and grievance procedures where appropriate.
3. Will interrelate with all academic staff in their School and many of the professional services staff, and with relevant parts of the Faculty and wider University.
4. Will play an active part in their national discipline groups and possibly in the operation of the appropriate Research Council(s) or other funding bodies.

Pathway 2 - Role Profile Level e

Professor (Grade M)

This profile assumes all the qualifications, skills and experiences required of a Level d researcher have been acquired. It also assumes that the responsibilities of a Level d researcher will have been fulfilled satisfactorily. Only the additional requirements are spelled out below

Role Summary

1. Role holders at this level will have substantial experience of research leadership and related management/administration.
2. They will enjoy a wide recognition for their expertise within the academic community internationally (as evidenced by conference invitations, journal editorships, office holding in specialist groupings, associations with appropriate Research Councils etc.).
3. They will have made recognised and significant contributions to the developing knowledge and understanding of their research area.
4. They will already have responsibilities for the creation, initiation, development and overall management of significant research programmes.
5. They will be expected to 'profess' their discipline within the School, as appropriate and consonant with the terms of their funding.
6. This role will typically require significant leadership or management contributions, usually within the School but sometimes in the University more widely.

Qualifications, skills and experience needed for appointment/promotion to Level e

1. A recognised international and national reputation with peers for the quality and significance of their research work.
2. Substantial visible signs of external peer recognition for their research eminence.
3. Depth and breadth of knowledge in their academic discipline, which supports the development of new knowledge and understanding in that field.
4. Ability to effectively lead and motivate people.
5. Experience of leading the successful design of research programmes.
6. Ability to act as a professional role model to other academic staff, in relation to research and/or management activity.
7. An understanding of resource management processes and the skills to apply them effectively.
8. Experience of managing research funding or other resources (as appropriate for the discipline).
9. A good knowledge of University policies and procedures and of the issues in the higher education, research and political context.

Responsibilities

- Plan and lead the successful implementation of research activities and programmes of outstanding quality and international repute in their subject area ensuring that outputs meet School and/or

Faculty expectations for quality and quantity and that impact of research and opportunities to demonstrate this is appropriately considered.

- Manage effectively the teams of people, and the other resources, needed to deliver the research plan, as appropriate for the discipline.
- Lead major funding bids, which successfully develop and sustain research support for their specialist area and advance the reputation of the School and University in the area.
- Provide effective intellectual leadership in acquiring, analysing and interpreting research data, using techniques, models and methods selected, developed, refined or devised for the purpose.
- Publish research results in appropriate fora and making an international impact through the successful dissemination of their work.
- Provide expert advice, mentoring, motivation and support on research issues for other academic staff within the School.
- Participate actively in the development of the School's research strategy, both specifically in the area of their expertise and more generally.
- Lead successful research and collaborative partnerships with other educational institutions or other relevant bodies.
- Contribute effectively to School/Faculty/University committees and working groups.
- Take positions of responsibility within the School/Faculty/University.
- In consultation with Head of School, take an ambassadorial role in relation to international activity and actively promote the University's internationalisation strategy.
- Lead significant initiatives to achieve engagement with research, and/or impact beyond academia.
- Promote full and effective participation in Staff Review and Development and demonstrate a commitment to mentoring and other continuing professional development activities for their self and others. Their own development may include engagement with the University's [CREATE scheme](#) or Health Professions Education programme.
- May undertake some teaching relevant to their specialism.
- Actively promote the University's equality and diversity agenda.
- Take responsibility for Health and Safety issues.
- Engage with the sustainability agenda, including working towards relevant benchmarks/awards as appropriate.
- Actively involve themselves in promoting and embedding a culture of engagement beyond academia within the School/Faculty/University.
- Establish information and communications systems, including effective internal communications, such as social events, which help support the School to achieve its goals.
- Effectively represent the School when working with colleagues from other parts of the University and/or external organisations.

- Consistently act as a good citizen, actively undertaking administration duties and participating fully in the daily working life of the School.

Relationships and Contacts

1. Will be line managed by the Head of School (or Head of Primary Unit).
2. Will relate to academic staff within the School and beyond on a regular basis.
3. Will be responsible for, and work with, professional services staff.
4. Will have significant contacts with senior members of the Faculty and/or University, both academic and professional services.
5. Will work closely with external research bodies.

Will represent the University externally, to government agencies, research funders, and industrial partners.

ANNEX D1



REF OVERSIGHT BOARD

TERMS OF REFERENCE & MEMBERSHIP

1.	Authority
1.1	The REF Oversight Board (ROB) was established by University Research Committee and will operate within the remit and authorities as stipulated in these Terms of Reference.
1.2	It is authorised by University Research Committee to oversee the development of the University's submission to the Research Excellence Framework (REF), and to agree and monitor the implementation of institutional REF policy and strategy.
2.	Purpose
2.1	The purpose of the REF Oversight Board is to ensure that the University is on track to achieve a high-quality REF submission, and that decisions being made enable the best possible outcome for the University.
3.	Specific duties
The Board will carry out the following duties below on behalf of the University Research Committee:	
3.1	To have strategic oversight of the University's submission to the REF, ensuring that progress is made, and deadlines are met in accordance with the University strategy and institutional REF timetable.
3.2	To agree institutional REF policy and process, and to oversee implementation of agreed policies across the institution, including in relation to the appointment to REF leadership roles and delivery of REF leadership responsibilities, ensuring adherence to the University's REF Code of Practice where relevant.
3.3	To review and approve REF submission strategies, including in relation to UOA configuration decisions.

3.4	To oversee and approve institutional elements relating to People, Culture and Environment, including associated metrics and indicators.
3.5	To receive regular reports from the Faculty REF Boards, REF Operations Group and REF Code of Practice Group regarding the progress made towards the development of the submission.
3.6	To receive advice on and oversee arrangements for ensuring that matters relating to equity, diversity and inclusion are fully implemented and monitored, ensuring adherence to the University's REF Code of Practice where relevant.
3.7	To provide a regular overview of progress on the development of the submission to University Research Committee and University Executive Board.
3.8	To recommend the final submission to University Research Committee for approval to submit.
4.	Membership
4.1	The REF Oversight Board will normally comprise the following 'ex officio members', who hold their positions by virtue of their office and are designated as leads in their respective areas: <u>Academic leads:</u> • Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) for Research and Innovation (Chair) • Associate Pro-Vice Chancellors for Research & Innovation (one from each Faculty) • Academic Directors (REF) (one from each Faculty) • Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research Environment and Culture <u>Professional Services leads:</u> • Chief People Officer, Human Resources (HR) • Director of Research Office (DREI) • Executive Director of Faculty Operations, Senior Team – invited based on relevance to agenda items • Director of Library Services and University Librarian, Library Services (LS) • Head of IT Partnering – Research, IT Services (ITS) • Director of Research Finance, Finance Services (FS) <u>REF Submission leads:</u>

	• Associate Director of Research Excellence, DREI
4.2	The Chair is responsible for the leadership of the Board, and to the University Research Committee for the Board's effectiveness. This includes: • ensuring that the Board acts fully within the responsibilities and authorities as set out in these Terms of Reference. • promoting the Board's efficient operation and ensuring the smooth running of Board meetings. • ensuring that the members work effectively, individually and together as a Board. • ensuring accountability for decisions made and actions taken.
4.3	The Board is supported by the DREI Research Project Officer as Secretary of the Board.
4.4	The following 'in attendance members' will have the right to receive Board papers and contribute to discussions and, but do not have voting rights. These members are included in the meetings to provide expertise and support, but their role does not extend to decision-making: • <u>Either</u> the Head or Deputy Head of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), HR • REF Impact Manager • Research Assessment Manager, DREI • Secretary to the Board, DREI
5.	Meetings
5.1	A meeting is constituted when members, including the Chair, meet face-to-face, by telephone, by video conference, by any other electronic means, or a combination of the above; and there is a quorum.
5.2	<u>Quorum:</u> The quorum necessary for the transaction of business is five members of the Board, including at least one Academic Lead, one Professional Services Lead, and one REF Submission Lead. For the avoidance of doubt, members attending by telephone or video call or any other electronic means will form part of the quorum for the meeting.
5.3	<u>Frequency:</u> The Board will normally meet four times per academic year, but no fewer than once per academic year.

5.4	<u>Delegation:</u> If the Chair of the Board is not able to attend a meeting in person, by telephone, video conference or other electronic means, they may pre-arrange a delegate from the Board membership.
5.5	<u>Nomination of alternate attendees:</u> Members who are unable to attend a meeting may send a nominee whom they deem suitably qualified, at the discretion of the Chair. Nominees shall NOT count towards the quorum and shall only be entitled to cast pre-agreed votes for the member for whom they are deputising.
5.6	<u>Invitees:</u> The Chair may invite others to attend a Board meeting for particular agenda items, or issue a standing invitation, if their presence will assist the business of the Board.
5.7	<u>Conflicts of interest:</u> Members and attendees must declare any conflict of interest relating to the business of the Board and may be asked to withdraw from a meeting during discussion of items for which there is a conflict. The University's Conflict of Interest Regulations apply.
5.8	<u>Paperwork:</u> The agenda and papers for a meeting will, as a matter of good practice, normally be sent to all those who are entitled to receive them seven days before each meeting.
5.9	<u>Voting:</u> - Only Board members have the right to vote at Board meetings. Attendees who are not members of the Board may speak at Board meetings to provide guidance, advice and opinion to the Committee, but shall not be entitled to vote. - Voting on any issue will be by a show of hands, and decisions are taken by simple majority. The Chair may vote and has the right to exercise a casting vote if a vote is tied.
5.10	<u>Transaction of business and decision-making between meetings:</u> Where decisions or discussions are required between meetings of the Board, business may be conducted by correspondence (including by email) where deemed appropriate by the Chair. A decision taken by correspondence shall be valid as though taken at a meeting of the Board.
5.11	<u>Chair's action</u> Where decisions or discussions are required between meetings of the Board, and - it is impractical to convene a Board meeting (including by telephone, video-conferencing and other electronic means) due to the urgency of the matter; or - the Chair considers that it would not be appropriate for business to be conducted by correspondence,

	the Chair may take decisions or actions on behalf of the Board. Any such Chair's actions taken between meetings of the Board shall be recorded, reported to the next meeting of that Board and reported to any body or individual to which the Board would normally report its proceedings and decisions.
5.12	<u>Reporting:</u> - The Board will report to the University Research Committee at least twice a year. - The Board's reporting will include due consideration of any implications linked to equity, diversity and inclusion when conducting its business, making decisions and agreeing actions. - The Board may make recommendations to the University Research Committee on any matter within its remit, authority and responsibilities. - The Board will consider risk, as it relates to its area of activities and Terms of Reference, on at least an annual basis and report to Senate regarding the same.
6.	Effectiveness Monitoring and Compliance with Terms of Reference
6.1	The Board will review its efficiency and effectiveness annually including the relevance of its remit, authorities and powers as stipulated in its Terms of Reference, and its membership.
Recommended for approval by ROB: 10 April 2025 (with minor edits made and noted at the July meeting prior to submission to URC) Approval by URC: 22 September 2025 Review date: March 2026	

ANNEX D2



FACULTY REF BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.	Authority
1.1	The Faculty REF Board (FRB) was originally established by the University Research Committee (URC) and now operates under the institutional REF Governance Framework, with the REF Oversight Board (ROB) as its parent committee.
1.2	The FRB exercises delegated authority from the ROB to oversee and coordinate Faculty-level REF planning and submission development in line with policies, processes and guidance set by the ROB. URC is notified of these Terms of Reference for transparency.
1.3	The FRB for [insert Faculty name] is responsible for the following Units of Assessment (UoAs): • [Insert UoA number and name] • [Insert UoA number and name]
2.	Purpose
2.1	To provide strategic oversight, coordination and assurance for the development and delivery of high-quality REF submissions across all UoAs within the Faculty.
2.2	To ensure that Faculty-level REF activity is delivered in a timely, consistent and responsible manner.
2.3	To support the coherent development of the Faculty's contributions to the institutional REF submission and ensure effective integration with governance and assurance structures.
3.	Responsibilities
3.1	Oversee the development of REF submissions across all Faculty UoAs.
3.2	Monitor progress against the institutional REF timetable and identify risks or resource needs.
3.3	Ensure that the REF Code of Practice (CoP) and all policies, processes and guidance set by the ROB are applied consistently across all UoAs
3.4	Ensure that output review, calibration and evidence-gathering processes are robust and appropriate.
3.5	Review Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) related to Faculty REF activity and ensure appropriate actions are taken.

3.6	Review and recommend the Faculty's annual Staff HESA Return volume-measure summary for approval by the ROB.
3.7	Ensure that Strategy, People, and Research Environment (SPRE) statements and supporting evidence are accurate, coherent and aligned with institutional requirements.
3.8	Ensure UoAs have sufficient leadership and administrative support, escalating concerns where needed.
3.9	Recommend the Faculty's REF submission to the REF Oversight Board prior to institutional submission.
3.10	Ensure clear communication of relevant non-confidential REF information across Schools, Departments and other relevant units.
3.11	Ensure key information and decisions are communicated to School/ Department leadership.
3.12	Report regularly to the REF Oversight Board on progress, risks and readiness.
4.	Membership
4.1	Core members • Faculty Academic Director (REF) – Chair • UoA Coordinators (for UoAs listed in Section 1.3) • Additional members appointed for relevant expertise.
4.2	In attendance (non-voting) • Associate Director Research Excellence • REF Impact Manager or Associate • REF SPRE Associate • Faculty REF Manager (Board Manager) • Faculty REF Administrator (Clerk to the Board)
4.3	Current Membership: <i>Name, job title</i>
5.	Chair
5.1	The Chair is responsible for leading the FRB, ensuring effective operation, and serving as the primary link to the REF Oversight Board.
6.	Meetings
6.1	A meeting is constituted when the Chair (or nominee) and a quorum are present in person or via electronic means.
6.2	Quorum for the meeting is achieved when the Chair (or their nominated delegate) and at least 50% of core members are present.

6.3	For decisions affecting the Faculty's REF submission, representation from each UoA is required. This may be met by the UoA Coordinator or their nominated alternate. If a meeting proceeds without full UoA representation, decisions may be discussed but must be confirmed with the relevant UoA Coordinators before they are finalised.
6.4	The FRB will normally meet four times per academic year, and additionally as required by the REF timetable.
6.5	The Chair may invite others to attend for specific items.
6.6	Conflicts of interest must be declared and may require withdrawal from discussion. The University's Conflict of Interest Regulations apply.
6.7	Papers will normally be circulated at least seven days in advance
6.8	Only core members may vote; decisions are by simple majority. The Chair has a casting vote.
6.9	Urgent business may be conducted by correspondence. The Chair may take Chair's Action when necessary, with actions reported at the next meeting.
7.	Reporting
7.1	The FRB reports to the REF Oversight Board through the Faculty Academic Director (REF).
7.2	A written quarterly report is submitted to the REF Oversight Board, covering progress, risks, resource issues and matters requiring escalation. The Faculty REF Manager supports the Faculty Academic Director (REF) in preparing this report.
8.	Effectiveness review
8.1	The FRB will review its effectiveness, remit and membership annually.
9.	Document control
9.1	Recommended by FRB: Approved by ROB: URC notified: Next review: Contact: Faculty REF Manager (ref-help@bristol.ac.uk)

ANNEX D3



UNIT OF ASSESSMENT (UoA) COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.	Authority
1.1	The UoA Committee operates under the authority of the Faculty REF Board (FRB) for [insert name of Faculty], which delegates responsibility for developing the UoA-level contribution to the institutional REF submission.
1.2	The Committee reports to the FRB and works in line with Faculty and institutional REF policies, processes, guidance and timetables. Operational approaches may be adapted locally to reflect disciplinary needs, provided these Terms of Reference are met.
2.	Purpose
2.1	To support the development of a high-quality UoA submission, covering outputs, impact, and Strategy, People, and Research Environment (SPRE), in line with Faculty and institutional expectations.
2.2	To make recommendations to the FRB on key UoA-level decisions, including output selection, impact case study selection, research independence decisions, and UoA allocations.
2.3	To ensure that UoA-level processes are timely, fair and consistent with the REF Code of Practice and principles of responsible research assessment.
3.	Responsibilities
3.1	Outputs • Develop and implement a proportionate, transparent process for output review. • Conduct calibration exercises where appropriate. • Recommend intermediate and final output selections to the FRB.
3.2	Impact • Support the identification, development and review of impact case studies. • Recommend final case study selections to the FRB.
3.3	Research independence and UoA allocation • Recommend independence decisions for Pathway 2 staff contracts. • Recommend UoA allocations for Pathway 1 and 2 staff contracts.
3.4	SPRE development • Contribute to the disciplinary evidence base and narrative for the SPRE element. • Ensure alignment with institutional guidance.

3.5	EDI and Code of Practice compliance Ensure all UoA-level processes reflect the REF Code of Practice (CoP) and consider equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).
3.6	Monitoring and reporting - Provide regular updates to the FRB on progress, risks and resource needs. - Escalate concerns or issues requiring Faculty-level action.
3.7	Submission recommendation Prepare and recommend the final UoA submission to the FRB for review and approval.
4.	Membership
4.1	The precise membership of the UoA Committee should be determined locally, reflecting the disciplinary needs, size and structure of the Unit of Assessment.
4.2	As a minimum, core membership must include: - UoA Coordinator (Chair) - Head of School and/ or Head of Department - School Research Director
4.3	Additional core members may be included where appropriate to the UoA, such as: - UoA Impact Lead - UoA SPRE Lead - Academic staff with relevant disciplinary expertise - School Manager - Professional services or technical colleagues involved in research support
4.4	Others may be invited to attend meetings, as appropriate, to provide advice or support.
4.5	Current membership: <i>Name, job title</i>
5.	Chair
5.1	The Chair (normally the UoA Coordinator) is responsible for: - leading the Committee and ensuring it operates within these Terms of Reference - facilitating effective and constructive discussion - ensuring actions progress in line with the REF timetable - ensuring recommendations are submitted to the FRB
6.	Meetings
6.1	A meeting is constituted when the Chair (or nominee) and a quorum are present in person or via electronic means.

6.2	Quorum requires the UoA Coordinator (or their nominated alternate) and either the Head of School or the School Research Director. UoAs may introduce additional local expectations if needed.
6.3	The Committee will meet as and when required, and at least four times annually (typically ahead of the quarterly FRB meetings)
6.4	UoA Committees are not required to produce formal papers or minutes. Basic records of key recommendations, actions and issues for escalation should be maintained to support reporting to the Faculty REF Board.
6.5	Information for meetings may be shared in whatever form is most appropriate to the UoA (for example, email summaries, shared documents or brief verbal updates). Formal paper deadlines are not required.
6.6	Conflicts of interest must be declared and may require withdrawal from discussion. The University's Conflict of Interest Regulations apply.
6.7	Decision-making • Only members may vote; decisions are usually by simple majority. • Decision-making may take place outside meetings by correspondence. • The Chair may take Chair's Action on urgent matters, reporting back at the next meeting.
7.	Reporting
7.1	The Committee reports to the Faculty REF Board through the UoA Coordinator.
7.2	Reports should include updates on progress, risks, recommendations and EDI considerations.
8.	Effectiveness review
8.1	The Committee should periodically review its membership, processes and effectiveness, and make adjustments as necessary to support high-quality REF preparation.
9.	Document control
9.1	Recommended by UoAC: Approved by FRB: ROB notified: URC notified: Next review: Contact: Faculty REF Manager (ref-help@bristol.ac.uk)

ANNEX E



REF 2029 Staff Data Privacy Statement

The University of Bristol ("The University") is committed to protecting your personal data and for keeping you informed about how information about you is used.

This privacy statement applies to current and former employees of the University of Bristol whose personal data may be processed in preparation for the University's submission to the Research Excellence Framework 2029 (REF 2029).

REF 2029 is a national exercise managed by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to assess the quality of research in UK higher education institutions. It informs the selective allocation of public research funding and comprises assessment of:

- **Contribution to knowledge and understanding (CKU)**
- **Engagement and impact (EI)**
- **Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE)**

The submission requires data to calculate the volume of eligible contracts with significant responsibility for research, alongside research outputs and metadata, impact case studies, and institutional and disciplinary-level narrative statements which may include staff-related data and indicators.

This notice should be read in conjunction with the University's top level [Staff Privacy Notice](#).

Types of personal data processed

In preparation for and as part of the University of Bristol's submission to the Research Excellence Framework 2029 (REF 2029), we will collect and use the following categories of personal data relating to current and former staff:

- **Name and title**
- **Personal identifiers** such as ORCID, University username, HESA Staff ID, and employee number
- **Contract(s) of employment**, including HR system identifiers (e.g. from ERP systems such as MyERP), contract start and end dates, full-time equivalent (FTE), job title, grade, and contractual classification
- **Periods of unpaid leave or sabbatical**
- **Subject area and affiliations** with schools, faculties, and research groups, including REF-specific disciplinary areas (Units of Assessment (UoAs))
- **Details of research-related activities and achievements**, including but not limited to:
 - Research publications and author contributions
 - Research student supervision records

- Research funding applications and awards
- Academic titles
- Engagement and impact-generating activities

In accordance with REF 2029 requirements, data on current and former employees of the University of Bristol will be processed to categorise person-level and contract-level data as required by the HESA staff return and may be compared to the University's HESA submission to ensure accuracy and completeness.

We also need to process special categories of data which have been provided voluntarily by you:

- **Race or ethnicity**
- **Health data, including that relating to disabilities**

How we collect your data and how we use it

The information we process about you is collected from a number of sources, including directly from you and from existing University systems (Worktribe, MyERP, SITS and Pure).

Equality and diversity data will be used in pseudonymised form to support internal analysis and the development of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs). In the REF submission and any third-party reporting, this data will be presented in anonymised form, ensuring individuals cannot be identified — for example, as aggregated indicators within narrative statements on diversity at institutional or disciplinary level.

Special category data will only be processed where you have voluntarily provided it via MyERP and will be subject to appropriate safeguards. Processing will be undertaken only where it meets the substantial public interest in evaluating equality of opportunity or treatment.

We will not use your personal data for automated decision making about you or for profiling purposes.

We will process your personal data either in ways you have consented to, or because it is otherwise necessary for a lawful purpose.

The lawful basis for us to process your personal data for the above purposes is

- UK GDPR Article 6(1)(e) – Public task. This provision allows the University to process your personal data when necessary for the performance of a public task. REF 2029 forms part of the University's public tasks duties to advance learning through research and its dissemination.

The special category data as listed above, specifically race, ethnicity and health data, is being processed for the above purposes under the following additional lawful basis:

- UK GDPR Article 9(2)(g) of the UK GDPR (processing necessary for reasons of substantial public interest)
- Schedule 1, Part 2, Paragraph 8 of the DPA 2018 (equality of opportunity or treatment) For more information on how the University uses staff personal data (fair processing notice), please see the [staff data privacy notice](#).

Sharing your personal data

Your personal data will be accessed only by those University staff who require it to support the development of the REF 2029 submission. This includes individuals involved in activities related to **volume measure, research outputs, impact case studies, and Strategy, People and Research Environment statements**. Access may include:

- Staff in the **REF Team** within the **Division of Research, Enterprise and Innovation**
- **Academic Directors (REF)**
- **Unit of Assessment (UOA) Leads** – academic staff responsible for developing submissions in specific disciplinary areas
- Professional services staff in **Schools and Faculties** supporting UOA submissions
- Members of **REF Oversight Board, Faculty REF Boards** and **UoA Committees** and other committees established to oversee REF preparations
- Relevant **Heads of School, School Research Directors, School Managers**, and others with strategic oversight of REF submissions
- Staff in **Human Resources**, including the **HR Systems Team** and the **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team**
- Staff supporting **Open Access** and research outputs, including those in **Library Services**

Your details may be used to create and manage a profile in the University's **research information system (e.g. Pure)**, including the identification and review of outputs for submission. Your contact details may also be used to provide information about REF-related support, including open access compliance.

We may share your personal data with the following third parties as part of the University of Bristol's preparations for REF 2029:

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

REF 2029 is managed by the REF team at **Research England**, part of **UKRI**, on behalf of the four UK higher education funding bodies. We may share personal data with UKRI for the purposes of REF 2029, including participation in pilot exercises. Under this arrangement, UKRI acts as a **data controller** for personal data submitted by the University.

Guidance, systems and processes for REF 2029 are currently under development. For more information, please visit www.ref.ac.uk.

We will provide updated information on data sharing with third parties as REF 2029 guidance becomes available. Information on data processing during the previous exercise, REF 2021, is available here.

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Some staff data relevant to the REF submission may be shared with **HESA** as part of the University's regular HESA staff return. For more information, please refer to the [University's staff privacy notice](#) and the [HESA staff data collection notice](#).

External Reviewers

Textual components of the REF submission — including research outputs and metadata, impact case studies, and environment narratives — may be shared with external reviewers during the development and review process.

Where data is shared with external reviewers, we will ensure that only the **minimum necessary information** is disclosed. In some cases, this may involve transferring data to, and storing it at, destinations outside the UK. Such transfers will only occur with appropriate safeguards in place to protect the confidentiality and security of your personal data.

We require all third parties to respect the security of your personal data and to treat it in accordance with the law.

Please note that we may need to share your personal information with a regulator or to otherwise comply with the law, and the list above is not necessarily exhaustive.

Storage and retention of personal data

The University has put in place appropriate technical and organisational security measures to prevent your personal data from being accidentally lost or used, accessed, altered or disclosed in any unauthorised way.

Access to your personal data is limited to those that have a lawful and legitimate need to access it.

Personal data will be stored on approved University systems including Sharepoint and Pure. Access to this data is limited to staff with a legitimate need to access it and stored within the UK/ EEA. Where information is processed outside these territories, appropriate safeguards consistent with UK GDPR requirements will be applied.

We will only retain your personal data for as long as necessary to fulfil the purposes we collected it for, including for the purposes of satisfying any legal, accounting, or reporting requirements. We will keep your personal data according to the University's [Records Retention Schedule](#), holding it for 12 years beyond the REF submission deadline.

Your rights

Under certain circumstances, you may have the following rights in relation to the data we process:

- Right to request access to your personal data;
- Right to request correction of your personal data;
- Right to request erasure of your personal data;
- Right to object to processing of your personal data;
- Right to request restriction of the processing your personal data;
- Right to request the transfer of your personal data; and
- Right to withdraw consent.

For more information on these rights please visit the University's guidance [here](#). To exercise any of the above rights please contact the Data Protection Officer via data-protection@bristol.ac.uk

Questions, comments and complaints

If you have any questions or comments regarding this Privacy Notice, please contact: ref-help@bristol.ac.uk.

You can also contact the University's Data Protection Officer at: data-protection@bristol.ac.uk.

You can contact the [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\)](#) if you're unhappy with how we've handled your data.

Information about the University's REF submission and governance is available in the Draft University of Bristol REF 2029 Code of Practice and on the [REF Sharepoint site](#).

ANNEX F1



REF 2029 Code of Practice

Module: REF roles and responsibilities

Version: 1.1 (19.12.25)

Date approved by REF Oversight Board: 21.11.24

Process for assigning Unit of Assessment (UoA) Coordinator roles

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This section of the University's Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029 Code of Practice outlines a process for assigning Unit of Assessment (UoA) Coordinator roles to support the development of high-quality and compliant REF submissions. The process seeks to balance the practical necessity of timely assignment of roles and responsibilities with the imperative for fair and transparent processes.
- 1.2 The UoA Coordinators will provide leadership, strategic direction and coordination across all aspects of the REF submission for their assigned UoA.
- 1.3 There are two appointment scenarios for UoA Coordinators:
 - **Scenario 1:** UoA Coordinator already in post or recently assigned the role.
 - **Scenario 2:** UoA Coordinator not yet in post.
- 1.4 This approach allows flexibility in managing workloads and strategic priorities. It provides a pragmatic response to the demands of the REF 2029 process while remaining aligned with the University's commitments to EDI, as outlined in the Equality Act 2010. This includes ensuring equal access to opportunities, mitigating bias, encouraging diversity in leadership and promoting a supportive and inclusive culture.

2. Guiding Principles

- 2.1 The appointment process is underpinned by the following principles:
 - **Transparency:** Clear communication to the relevant research community around the assignment of roles.
 - **Fairness:** All staff with the required skills and experience are considered for vacancies.
 - **Equity and inclusion:** Proactive efforts are made to identify and mitigate barriers that could prevent individuals from qualifying for UoA Coordinator roles, ensuring equal access to opportunities.

3. Role definition and criteria

- 3.1 Heads of School are responsible for the REF 2029 return for their assigned UoA, delegating leadership and management to UoA Coordinators and, where relevant, other roles such as School Research Directors (SRDs) and School Impact Directors (SIDs).

3.2 The responsibilities of the UoA Coordinator role and criteria to inform selection are detailed in Annex 1. While many responsibilities are shared, the UoA Coordinator is expected to oversee all aspects of submission development and ensure that these responsibilities are met.

4. Appointment Scenarios

4.1 The specifics of the two appointment scenarios are detailed below:

Scenario 1: UoA Coordinator already in post or recently appointed

- The process and rationale for assigning the role to the designated individual will be documented, including a university-headed letter outlining the appointment date and terms of reference. This will be reviewed by the REF Oversight Board to ensure adherence to EDI principles.
- The role will be formally recognised in the Workload Allocation Model from 1 August 2025.
- The term of the UoA Coordinator will be set at 3 years, with the option to extend for a further 3 years to cover the period up to submission in late 2028, the subsequent lessons-learning in 2029 and publication of the results at the end of 2029.
- A new role assignment process will be developed and implemented once the term of the current UoA Coordinator ends or if the role holder steps down. Best practice will involve an open call for expressions of interest and the evaluation of candidates by an appointed panel using the criteria in Annex 1.
- If a previous role-holder is reappointed, structured efforts should be made to facilitate knowledge and skill transfer to other colleagues, particularly those from underrepresented groups. This could involve mentoring, shadowing, or collaborative leadership opportunities, which will support the development of a diverse and inclusive pipeline of leadership talent.

Scenario 2: UoA Coordinator not yet appointed

- A role assignment process will be developed and implemented once the term of the current UoA Coordinator ends or if the role holder steps down. Best practice will involve an open call for expressions of interest and the evaluation of candidates by an appointed panel using the criteria in Annex 1.
- The process and rationale for assigning the role to the designated individual will be documented, including a university-headed letter outlining the appointment date and terms of reference. This will be reviewed by the REF Oversight Board to ensure adherence to EDI principles.
- The role will be formally recognised in the Workload Allocation Model from August 2025.
- The term of the UoA Coordinator will be set at 3 years, with the option to extend for a further 3 years to cover the period up to submission in late 2028, the subsequent lessons-learning in 2029 and publication of the results at the end of 2029.
- Once the term of the current UoA Coordinator ends or if the role holder steps down, the process will be reviewed and amended if required.

- If a previous role-holder is reappointed, structured efforts should be made to facilitate knowledge and skill transfer to other colleagues, particularly those from underrepresented groups. This could involve mentoring, shadowing, or collaborative leadership opportunities, which will support the development of a diverse and inclusive pipeline of leadership talent.

5. Workload Allocation Model (WAM) allocation

5.1 UoA Coordinators will have their roles formally recognized in School Workload Allocation Models (WAM) from 1 August 2025. For 2025/26, a minimum allocation of 0.2 FTE is recommended for medium-sized submissions (approximately 50 FTE volume-contributing staff), with pro-rata adjustments as needed. WAM credit should be reviewed and increased as the submission deadline (autumn 2028) approaches.

6. Formal nomination and approval

6.1 UoA Coordinators will be nominated by their Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) and recommended to the REF Oversight Board for approval by 31 January 2025. Prior to approval, due consideration should be given to equality considerations to ensure diversity within the wider group of REF submission leads.

7. Review and evaluation

7.1 This process will be periodically reviewed to ensure it remains transparent, fair and efficient.

Annex 1: Role descriptor for Unit of Assessment (UoA) Coordinator

1. Responsibilities of the role

General Responsibilities:

- Deliver the REF 2029 UoA submission promptly and efficiently.
- Lead the development and execution of the UoA REF submission strategy, ensuring alignment with both institutional and Faculty REF strategies.
- Convene and chair UoA Committee meetings and attend Faculty REF Board meetings.
- Coordinate closely with the Faculty Academic Director (REF) and University REF team to ensure compliance with University processes, including attributing research to appropriate UoAs.
- Ensure the timely return of comprehensive and accurate data for all sections of the UoA submission, in line with guidelines from the UK Funding Bodies, the University and Faculty.
- Provide progress updates to the Faculty Academic Director (REF) and REF Oversight Board as needed to manage submission risks.
- Maintain a solid understanding of both general and UoA-specific REF 2029 requirements.
- Complete REF-related training (including EDI, open access and responsible research assessment) and adhere to the principles of the University's REF Code of Practice.
- Collaborate with SRDs, HOS, and others to foster a positive research culture.
- Raise awareness and lead REF-related communications within Schools and other organisational units involved in the UoA.

Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU)

- Oversee the review and selection of outputs for the UoA, following the principles of the University's REF Code of Practice.
- Assess and justify output double-weighting where appropriate.
- Lead final recommendations on output selection for submission.
- With support from the University REF Team, contribute to the UoA CKU evidence-based statement outlining the wider contribution to knowledge and understanding.

Engagement and Impact (EI)

- Support the development and selection of UoA Impact Case Studies, working with the Faculty Academic Director (Impact and Translation), UoA Impact Leads, and University REF teams.
- Recommend impact case studies for submission to the Faculty REF Board.
- Oversee the development of the UoA EI statement, collaborating with or delegating responsibilities to the UoA Impact Lead as needed.

Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE)

- Lead the development of the SPRE unit-level statement.
- Take final responsibility for the SPRE unit-level statement for submission.

2. Selection criteria

- **Research leadership and strategic insight:** Proven experience in research or REF leadership, with an awareness of the strategic goals of the University.
- **Commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI):** Strong commitment to promoting EDI, both in their own leadership style and in the management of the REF submission process.
- **Collaboration and communication skills:** Proven ability to work collaboratively and communicate effectively with diverse groups across the University.
- **Mentorship and knowledge transfer:** Commitment to developing the skills and expertise of the next generation of research leaders. This includes supporting capacity-building within the UoA by providing mentorship and facilitating opportunities for knowledge and skill transfer.
- **Organisational and project management skills:** Experience managing complex projects, with strong organisational skills and a track record of meeting tight deadlines.

ANNEX F2



REF 2029 Code of Practice

Module: Roles and responsibilities

Version: 1

Date approved by REF Oversight Board: 21.11.24

Guidance on REF 2029 panel membership

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This section of the University's REF 2029 Code of Practice provides guidance to ensure fair, transparent and inclusive treatment and support for all University staff serving as panel members for REF 2029. This applies to all panels, including the People, Culture and Environment (PCE) Pilot Panels, Research Diversity Advisory Panel (RDAP), People and Diversity Advisory Panel (PDAP), and the main REF panels and sub-panels.
- 1.2 Participation in REF panels offers significant benefits to both staff and the University. Staff members gain professional development opportunities, such as enhancing their skills in research evaluation and broadening their understanding of research quality standards. They also have the chance to network with leading researchers and academics from other institutions. For the University, having staff participate in REF panels enhances its reputation and brings valuable expertise and insights to REF preparations, both now and in the future.
- 1.3 Under the University's [Conflict of interest: outside work policy](#), REF panel membership is classed as a non-consultancy activity that does not normally require prior approval but should be declared. Such activity may be undertaken by any staff, regardless of role or contract type
- 1.4 These guidelines apply to all staff, regardless of contract type, including academics, researchers, knowledge exchange professionals, and professional services staff. Emphasising equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) principles is integral to this process, ensuring that all staff members are treated fairly and without bias.

2. Internal discussions

- 2.1 **Pre-application:** Staff members interested in serving on REF panels are encouraged to have an initial discussion with their Head of School or line manager to discuss the commitment and responsibilities involved prior to applying for panel membership.
- 2.1 **Post-appointment:** If appointed as a panel member, staff members are strongly encouraged to have further discussions with their Head of School or line manager to reach an agreement around the specific commitments and responsibilities involved. This ensures that overall workloads remain manageable for staff members and that both parties are clear on expectations and requirements. At this point, the staff member should formally declare the role by updating their Outside Work tab on [My ERP](#).
- 2.2 **Honoraria usage:** If applicable, during these discussions staff members should address the use of the honorarium. One of the following options should be chosen, taking account of the extent to

which the activity impacts on the member of staff's primary responsibilities and the level of support provided by the University:

- **Personal retention:** The staff member retains the honorarium in line with the University policy around non-consultancy work, which allows for the 'payment of modest fees' for such activities. This is the default option for all staff regardless of role or contract type.
- **University allocation:** The honorarium is paid to the University as a contribution towards costs incurred to enable panel membership (if substantial enough to warrant it).
- **Hybrid approach:** A portion of the honorarium is retained by the staff member, with the remainder allocated to the University.

2.3 Documentation: The outcome of these discussions, including use of the honorarium, should be documented in an email between the staff member and Head of School or line manager.

2.5 Advice: If either the staff member or Head of School/line manager has questions or concerns relating to REF panel membership, these can be raised in confidence with the Associate Director of Research Excellence or appropriate Faculty Academic Director (REF) (see Para. 6).

3. Fair and transparent treatment

3.1 Workload adjustments: Recognising the value to the University, when a staff member joins a REF panel, the Head of School or line manager should:

- **Recognise the additional workload** and provide guidance on balancing panel duties with regular responsibilities.
- **Adjust current duties** as appropriate to ensure they have sufficient time for panel responsibilities. This should be done fairly through the School Work Allocation Models or Professional Services equivalent and may involve redistributing tasks or arranging cover for teaching or administrative roles.
- **Address significant resourcing issues** arising from this appointment through the Integrated Planning Process. If resourcing needs cannot be met within existing budgets, the issue should be escalated to the appropriate Faculty REF Board (or directly if the staff member is not affiliated with a Faculty) for consideration by the REF Oversight Board.

3.2 Acknowledgement of Contributions: Contributions to REF panels should be formally recognised through the annual Development Review process and, if appropriate, recorded in the staff member's PURE record. Other ways to recognise and reward should be considered.

4. Monitoring and Review

4.1 Regular check-ins: Periodic check-ins between the staff member and their Head of School or line manager are encouraged to ensure that they are adequately supported throughout their REF panel duties. These meetings should monitor progress, discuss workload adjustments and address any emerging concerns.

4.2 Feedback mechanism: Staff members can confidentially raise any challenges or issues they encounter while fulfilling their REF duties with the Associate Director of Research Excellence or the appropriate Faculty Academic Director (REF) (see Para. 6).

5. Contribution to University REF preparations and future strategies

- 5.1** Staff members supported to serve as panel members are encouraged to contribute to the University's REF preparations in the short term and share their knowledge and experiences to enhance the University's REF strategies and submissions in the long term. This includes sharing their assessment expertise and general insights gained from panel participation. All contributions must adhere to the confidentiality requirements set for panel members, ensuring that privileged information is always protected. Confidential information refers to that which the REF panels generate and have access to throughout the REF process (Annex E, [REF 2029 Panel criteria and working methods](#), REF 2019/02).

6. Key contacts

- 6.1** Queries should be directed to:

Associate Director of Research Excellence
Academic Director (REF), Arts, Law and Social Sciences
Academic Director (REF), Health and Life Science
Academic Director (REF), Science and Engineering

ANNEX F3



REF 2029 Code of Practice

Module: Responsible assessment of outputs

Version: v1

Date approved by REF Oversight Board: 9.10.25

Process for robust and responsible assessment of research outputs

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This section of the University's REF 2029 Code of Practice outlines the institutional process for the responsible and transparent assessment of research outputs. It supports the development of a high-quality, inclusive and diverse research environment, ensuring that assessments are conducted fairly, consistently and in line with sector-wide reform.
- 1.2 The process reflects the University's commitments to the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#), the [CoARA Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment \(ARRA\)](#) and the [Barcelona Declaration on Open Research Information](#). It marks a shift toward qualitative, contextual and peer-informed evaluation, moving away from reliance on journal-based metrics and closed infrastructures.
- 1.3 This guided output review process initiates a transition toward continuous and reflexive research assessment. From 2025–26 through to 2027–28, output review will be conducted annually to support the development of the University's REF 2029 submission, including the final selection of outputs to optimise submissions in the final year of the REF cycle.
- 1.4 From 2028-29 onward, the University will embed an annual cycle of output review as part of a broader research quality review process. Developed collaboratively with Schools, Faculties and other research units, this review aims to strengthen peer review culture (enabling both formative and summative assessment) and to enhance collective understanding of research quality, focus and impact across disciplines.

2. Principles and Commitments

- 2.1 **Responsible and contextual assessment:** Assessment must be based on expert peer review, informed by appropriate contextual information and supported by responsible use of indicators:
 - Peer review is the primary method of assessment, supported by responsible use of quantitative indicators.
 - Journal-based metrics must not be used as proxies for quality.
 - Output-level metrics may support peer review but must not deflate ratings.
 - Reviewers must consider the context, purpose and audience of each output.
 - All reviewers must complete output reviewer training.
- 2.2 **Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity (EDI):** The process must ensure that all individuals whose research has been enabled and supported by the University have equal opportunity to have their outputs considered. Assessment practices must be inclusive and sensitive to disciplinary and career-stage differences:

- Outputs may be proposed from a wide range of contributors, including academic staff, technicians, research-enabling staff and others whose work has been substantively supported by the institution.
- Assessment must be fair and informed, avoiding bias related to the contributor's characteristics (including career stage) and recognising the value of diverse disciplinary norms, research approaches and output types.
- Processes must ensure parity of opportunity and actively guard against bias in assessment.

2.3 Transparency and open research information: Transparency is essential to build trust in the assessment process. The University also supports open research information practices to ensure accountability and accessibility. However, the sharing of reviews conducted for REF purposes must be approached with care to avoid unintended consequences and protect the integrity of peer review:

- All outputs must be proposed and reviewed using Pure. In 2025–26, flexibility is allowed for reviews conducted outside Pure, provided results are entered by Faculty REF Teams.
- Units of Assessment (UoAs) must document and share their review and calibration processes.
- Where appropriate, evidence used in assessment (e.g. reviewer comments, metrics) should be visible to those whose outputs are being assessed. Decisions about sharing reviews must be made in context, with consideration for disciplinary norms, reviewer anonymity, and the potential for undue pressure or bias.
- The University supports the use of open scholarly infrastructures and metadata standards (e.g. persistent identifiers such as DOIs and ORCIDs) to ensure transparency and interoperability.

2.4 Calibration and continuous improvement: Calibration promotes consistency and shared understanding among reviewers. When continuous improvement is approached reflexively, assessment practices evolve through learning, dialogue and critical reflection:

- Calibration exercises are encouraged to promote consistency and fairness, particularly where UoAs comprise more than one School, Department or Research Group with varied disciplinary perspectives.
- In 2025–26, calibration may take place at any point in the review process to support learning and adaptation. From 2026–27 onward, calibration should be undertaken prior to the full review process commencing, to promote shared understanding and consistency from the outset. Follow-up calibration exercises during or after the review may also be used to support reflective practice and continuous improvement.
- UoAs must describe their calibration approach in their output review plan and reflect on its effectiveness.

2.5 Use of AI and emerging tools: Emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), must be used responsibly and transparently in research assessment. Their use must support academic judgement, uphold integrity and reflect institutional values of fairness, equity and rigour.

- UoAs must refer to institutional guidance (in development) on the use of AI in REF preparations.
- Any use of AI tools in the review process must be transparent, documented and aligned with responsible research practices.

- AI must support, not replace, human judgement. All decisions about research quality, disciplinary fit and output selection must be made by qualified staff.
- AI use must be documented using the institutional pro forma and approved through the REF Oversight Board where required.

2.6 Prohibited use of AI: The following uses of AI are strictly prohibited to safeguard research integrity, uphold human accountability and prevent misuse that could compromise the quality, fairness or credibility of REF submissions. Any other use must be supported by an approved use case through the agreed oversight process:

- Using AI to make final judgements about research quality or disciplinary fit of research outputs.
- Selecting material for submission solely on the basis of AI-generated recommendations or scoring.
- Drafting narrative content without human validation, interpretation and oversight.
- Processing confidential, sensitive or personal data using unsecured or publicly accessible AI tools.
- Allowing AI use to reinforce bias or marginalise disciplines, contributors or research types.
- Training or deploying AI models using citation-based metrics (e.g. Journal Impact Factors, H-indices) as proxies for research quality, due to their incompatibility with responsible research assessment principles.

3. Process overview

3.1 Preparation and review: Each Unit of Assessment (UoA) is responsible for designing and implementing an output review process that supports robust, fair and informed assessment. The process must align with institutional principles of responsible research assessment and be documented in a REF output review plan (pro forma provided).

- **Planning:** The REF output review plan must outline how outputs will be selected, reviewed and calibrated to ensure consistency and confidence in assessment outcomes. UoA Coordinators should develop this plan using the pro forma provided, with support from the REF Team as required. Plans will be checked by the REF Team to ensure adherence to the principles of responsible research assessment prior to the commencement of the process.
- **Output proposal:** Outputs must be proposed for review via Pure, either by the individual contributor or by UoA Coordinators/Faculty REF Teams on their behalf. As Pure access is currently limited to academic and research staff, proposals for eligible contributors without access (e.g. technicians, research-enabling staff) should be submitted by others with access or via an approved alternative process. All outputs must be entered into Pure to ensure traceability and consistency.
- **Reviewer selection and training:** Review panels must be composed to ensure appropriate disciplinary expertise and, where possible, diversity of perspective. All panel members must complete output review training prior to participating in the assessment process.
- **Review process:** Each output should receive at least two independent peer reviews. Reviews should be conducted in Pure unless an alternative method is agreed for 2025–26, with results subsequently entered by Faculty REF Teams.

- **Calibration:** UoAs are expected to undertake a calibration exercise to promote consistency and shared understanding. In 2025–26, calibration may take place at any point in the process to support learning and adaptation. From 2026–27 onward, calibration should be undertaken before the full review begins, with optional follow-up exercises encouraged to support reflective practice and continuous improvement.
- **Internal management:** UoA Coordinators are responsible for setting the local timetable for output proposal and review, ensuring the process is completed by the institutional deadline. A suggested timetable for the 2025–26 review cycle, with a review deadline of 28 February 2026, is provided in Table 1.

3.2 Oversight: To ensure transparency, alignment with institutional principles and robust assessment outcomes, a structured oversight mechanism is in place to support UoA output review activities.

- **Transparency:** All relevant documentation will be made available via the REF SharePoint site to ensure accessibility for all staff involved in the process.
- **UoA reporting:** Upon completion of the output review process, each UoA must submit a brief report to the REF Team. This report should summarise the review process, highlight any issues encountered, comment on the quality of outputs assessed and include a confidence statement. These reports contribute to the institutional audit trail.
- **Faculty panels and output review sessions:** Each Faculty will convene a panel to review the UoA output review reports. Panels will be chaired by the Faculty Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (APVC) for Research and Innovation and include the Faculty REF Director, Associate Director of Research Excellence, Research Assessment Manager and invited assessment experts acting as critical friends. Each UoA Coordinator will meet with their Faculty panel separately to discuss the review process, challenges encountered and any support needs. Following this, a Red–Amber–Green (RAG) rating will be assigned to both the review process and the resulting output profile. Ratings will be agreed collaboratively with the UoA Coordinator and used to support oversight and future planning.
- **Institutional Review:** Following the completion of all Faculty output review sessions, the REF Oversight Board (ROB) will conduct an institutional review, with onward reporting to the Academic Leadership Board (ALB) and University Executive Board (UEB). This review is aligned with the Faculty Integrated Planning Process (IPP), which includes a REF KPI focused on identifying high-quality outputs and creating selection pools to optimise submission. The KPI measures the proportion of outputs rated high 3* or 4* relative to the total number required for submission, with targets set at ≥50% for 2025–26 and 100% for 2026–27.

Table 1: Suggested timetable for 2025-26

Phase	Timeline	Key Activities
Planning & preparation	Sept-Oct 2025	• UoA Coordinators draft output review plans • REF Team checks plans for alignment with principles
Reviewer training & calibration	Oct 2025	• Reviewers complete output reviewer training. • Calibration exercises conducted (flexible timing in 2025–26)
Output proposal window	Oct–Nov 2025	• Outputs proposed via Pure by contributors or REF Team (ensuring inclusion of eligible contributors without Pure access)
Review period	Nov 2025 – end Feb 2026	• Peer review of outputs (minimum two reviews per output) • Reviews conducted in Pure or entered by Faculty REF Teams
UoA reporting	March 2026	• UoAs submit short pro forma summarising: ○ Review process ○ Issues encountered ○ Output quality ○ Confidence statement
Faculty panels	April – May 2026	• Panels review UoA reports • Meetings held with UoA Coordinators • RAG ratings assigned collaboratively
Institutional review	July 2026	• REF Oversight Board reviews UoA reports • Reporting to ALB and UEB (including IPP REF KPI)
Documentation & transparency	Ongoing	• All materials uploaded to REF SharePoint • Guidance and templates kept up to date

ANNEX F4



REF 2029 Code of Practice

Module: Responsible use of AI for REF

Version: v.1

Date approved by REF Oversight Board: 9.10.25

Guidelines for responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other digital technologies in REF 2029 submission development

THESE GUIDELINES ARE PART OF A PILOT FOR AY 2025-26 AND ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE AS THE PILOT EVOLVES.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This section of the University's REF 2029 Code of Practice sets out expectations and guiding principles for the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other digital technologies, including generative AI (GenAI), machine learning and other algorithmic or computational systems, in the development of REF submissions. These technologies may support tasks such as content generation, data analysis, modelling, metadata management and strategic planning.
- 1.2 The guidance aligns with REF 2029's core principles of rigour, fairness, equity, transparency and integrity. It is informed by sector-wide frameworks for responsible research assessment, including the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and Coalition to Advance Research Assessment (CoARA), and emerging best practice on the ethical use of AI in research.⁵ It reflects the University's broader commitment to responsible innovation, inclusive research culture and the ethical use of digital technologies (both AI and non-AI systems) in support of research excellence.

2. Definition, scope and governance

- 2.1 For the purposes of REF submission development, AI technologies are defined as computer-based techniques that imitate or approximate human cognitive functions such as reasoning, problem-solving, classification or content creation. These typically include systems that apply AI methods such as machine learning or large language models, as well as related computational approaches such as natural language processing, to generate, summarise, classify, interpret or make predictions based on data.
- 2.2 In addition, these guidelines also cover non-AI digital technologies where their operation influences REF-relevant decisions or content, particularly if they involve algorithmic logic, external data processing or integration with AI-enabled workflows. Examples include metadata management platforms, automated classification systems or proprietary technologies whose internal processes are not fully transparent.
- 2.3 For clarity, digital technologies in scope can be described by either the type of system (e.g. machine learning models, natural language processing technologies, large language models or

⁵ For example: UK Research Integrity Office (2025) Code of practice for research: Promoting good practice and preventing misconduct. Version 3.5. UKRIO. Available at: <https://ukrio.org/wp-content/uploads/UKRIO-Code-of-Practice-for-Research.pdf>; European Commission & ERA Forum (2024) *Living Guidelines on the Responsible Use of Generative AI in Research*. Published 20 March 2024. European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/research-and-innovation/living-guidelines-generative-ai-research_en

rule-based/statistical systems) or the task they support (e.g. classifying outputs, predicting citation impact, generating narrative text or synthesising consultation feedback).

- 2.4 Any tool (AI or otherwise) that influences REF-relevant decisions in a way that is not fully interpretable, explainable or easily auditable should be considered in scope. Purely mechanical technologies (e.g. formatting, data entry) are out of scope.
- 2.5 These guidelines apply to all staff involved in REF submission development, including assessment and selection of submission content, narrative drafting, evidence compilation and strategic planning across Units of Assessment (UoAs).
- 2.6 Use of AI and other digital technologies in this context is governed by the University's REF Oversight Board, which reports to the University Research Committee. The Board ensures that use aligns with institutional policies on digital technologies, data protection and responsible research and innovation. It is responsible for reviewing and approving proposed use cases and for ensuring that applications support the integrity, fairness and strategic coherence of REF submissions.

3. Principles for AI use

- 3.1 AI technologies and other digital technologies can enhance efficiency and support strategic planning but must not replace human judgement. Their use in REF-related processes should uphold academic and professional autonomy, ensuring that decisions remain transparent, contextual and free from undue influence.
- 3.2 All REF-related content and decisions remain the responsibility of the staff involved (academic or professional services) who must supervise and take full accountability for tasks supported by AI or other digital technologies.
- 3.3 AI and other digital technologies must be used in line with the following principles to ensure they support REF preparation in a responsible and appropriate way:
- **Transparency:** Where digital technologies contribute meaningfully to submission content or decision-making, their use must be documented. Documentation should be maintained using the Use Case Pro Forma ([Appendix A](#)) and stored in the central REF submission repository. Approved use cases will be made accessible to all staff through the REF 2029 SharePoint site for transparency and shared learning.
 - **Human oversight:** Digital technologies must not make final decisions about research quality, disciplinary fit or output and impact case study selection. All decisions must be made by designated staff with the necessary expertise and responsibility.
 - **Integrity and reproducibility:** Digital technologies must not be used to fabricate content, references or evidence. All outputs must be grounded in real, verifiable activity and reviewed for accuracy. Where AI or algorithmic systems are used for analytical or generative purposes, staff should check whether the same input gives the same result each time. For reproducibility, maintain records of code, model version, training data and environment. Document dependencies (libraries, packages) to allow re-running for audit if needed.
 - **Data protection:** Use of digital technologies must comply with data protection laws and institutional data governance policies. This includes ensuring data accuracy, minimisation, secure processing and clear provenance. Confidential, sensitive or personal data must not be processed using public or unsecured platforms. Only institutionally approved, compliant

technologies may be used. Where feasible, staff are encouraged to use local stand-alone models hosted within institutionally approved environments, as this can enhance data protection, support reproducibility and reduce environmental impact. Staff should also be aware that vendors may withdraw or alter cloud-hosted models without notice; local or institutionally hosted models are therefore preferable for critical or reproducibility-sensitive tasks

- **Equity and representativeness:** Digital technologies must not reinforce bias or under-represent particular disciplines, research types or contributors. Human oversight is essential to ensure inclusive and balanced representation across all areas of research. For example, AI-supported synthesis should avoid disproportionately favouring science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines over the arts, humanities or social sciences, and should seek to reflect the full diversity of research contributions, methodologies and disciplinary perspectives within the institution.
- **Critical engagement:** Content produced or informed by digital technologies must be treated as provisional and subject to human judgement. Staff must critically evaluate all contributions to ensure they reflect contextual understanding, disciplinary nuance and institutional values. Where appropriate, staff are encouraged to seek peer input or compare AI-generated insights with other sources such as expert review, benchmarking data or consultation feedback.
- **Intellectual authorship and ownership:** Human authors retain responsibility for the final content. Digital technologies must support, not replace, scholarly interpretation. Where staff create models, training datasets or code in the course of their employment (using university equipment, data or time) intellectual property will normally belong to the University, in accordance with institutional IP policy.
- **Interpretability and explainability:** Systems should, where possible, be chosen and configured so that their overall operation (interpretability) and the rationale for specific outputs (explainability) can be understood and justified. This does not require every staff member to understand the technical detail, but the process and reasoning must be sufficiently clear to enable appropriate oversight and informed challenge.

4. Permitted uses of AI and other digital technologies

- 4.1 AI and other digital technologies may be used to support both the strategic development and content preparation of REF submissions, provided that all generated material or recommendations are subject to appropriate review and oversight.
- 4.2 Where modelling or classification technologies are used, preference should be given to interpretable systems whose logic and assumptions can be understood by staff. Avoid relying on opaque, black-box models where interpretation is not possible.
- 4.3 Each proposed application of AI or other digital technologies in this context must be supported by a brief use case that outlines its purpose, scope and anticipated benefit. To minimise administrative burden, use cases should be completed using the standard pro forma ([Appendix A](#)) and submitted to the REF Team for review. The pro forma captures key details including the tool name, intended use, expected benefit, oversight arrangements and equity considerations. Final oversight and approval of all applications rests with the REF Oversight Board.
- 4.4 **REF submission development and content preparation:** AI and other digital technologies may be used to support drafting and synthesis tasks, provided that all contributions are critically

reviewed and responsibility for final content rests with human authors. Final narrative structure, emphasis and interpretation must rest with staff. Care should be taken to ensure that technologies do not misrepresent or exaggerate evidence. The following are likely to be permitted uses, provided a use case is submitted and approved in line with the oversight process:

- Summarising transcripts or consultation feedback to inform narrative statements.
- Generating structured prompts or suggestions to guide the development of narrative text, based on verified source materials.
- Reviewing or formatting output metadata for consistency and completeness.
- Improving language clarity, grammar and accessibility.

All AI-generated summaries, prompts or suggestions must be traceable to verified source materials. Staff should retain a record of the inputs used (e.g. transcripts, datasets, consultation notes) and ensure that generated content can be linked back to these sources for audit and review purposes.

4.5 Strategic planning and modelling: AI and other digital technologies may be used to support modelling and benchmarking to enable submission optimisation, provided that analyses are used to inform rather than determine decisions. Staff must interpret results in light of institutional priorities, strategic context and equity considerations, with explicit human checks for potential bias or misrepresentation. Potential applications, subject to an approved use case, include:

- Identifying reasonable adjustments to the allocation of the volume measure (contract FTE) across Units of Assessment, factoring in the research focus of staff, UoA descriptors and other criteria such as meaningful fit with the wider Unit.
- Mapping research outputs (identified through peer review as strong, such as high 3* or 4*) to suitable UoAs, including interdisciplinary allocation where the UoA descriptors and research contributions justify dual submission.
- Supporting human peer review by checking the integrity of material, such as flagging inconsistencies, potential plagiarism or fabrication, while not rating submissions.
- Supporting human peer assessment of impact case studies by checking for clarity and whether key REF eligibility criteria (e.g. link between research and impact) are met.
- Using REF 2021 data to model the implications of staff and content allocation decisions for quality-related (QR) funding and REF rankings, to support strategic refinement as peer review and quality assessments evolve.

5. Prohibited uses of AI and other digital technologies

5.1 The following uses of AI and other digital technologies are strictly prohibited to safeguard research integrity, uphold human accountability and prevent misuse that could compromise the quality, fairness or credibility of REF submissions. Any other use must be supported by an approved use case through the agreed oversight process:

- Using AI or digital technologies to make final judgements about research quality, disciplinary fit or to select material for submission solely on the basis of automated recommendations or scoring.
- Drafting narrative content without human validation, interpretation and oversight.
- Fabricating or inventing references, data, evidence or quotations.

- Processing confidential, sensitive or personal data on unsecured or publicly accessible platforms.
- Using problematic citation-based metrics (e.g. Journal Impact Factors, H-indices) as the primary basis for training or validating models intended to assess research quality. These metrics are widely criticised for being reductive, discipline-biased and incompatible with responsible research assessment principles. Where citation-based indicators are used, they must be field-normalised, contextually interpreted and never treated as proxies for research quality.

6. Documentation and oversight

- 6.1 All approved applications of AI and other digital technologies must be documented clearly and transparently to provide accountability, enable effective review and ensure alignment with responsible research assessment principles. Documentation should be proportionate to the scale and risk of the use case and retained for at least five years after submission (the REF 2029 submission deadline is autumn 2028). It must be accessible to the REF Oversight Board and relevant audit teams.
- 6.2 To support transparency and assurance, documentation kept by the user(s) should, as appropriate and proportionate to the scale and risk of the use case, include:
 - The technologies used, their purpose and any associated materials (e.g. R/Python scripts, trained models or prompt outlines).
 - The specific model variant used, including version number and configuration details (e.g. GPT-4o, v1.2 configuration).
 - Inputs provided (e.g. datasets, documents, prompts) alongside the model version, to define the full corpus available during execution. If retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) is used, staff must retain a record of the additional corpus (e.g. a bibliography of uploaded documents or a permalink to datasets).
 - For machine learning models, a short technical summary (e.g. supervised classification, clustering, training data characteristics, validation method).
 - Version-controlled records for any custom code or models, stored in institutionally approved repositories (e.g. GitHub Enterprise, Bitbucket or other secure platforms).
 - Where possible, staff should use institutionally hosted repositories with access controls for storing scripts, models and configuration files.
 - How modelling or analysis informed decision-making.
 - Confirmation that all outputs/recommendations generated by digital technologies were reviewed and approved by appropriate staff.
 - Steps taken to ensure equity, inclusiveness and representativeness in the process.
- 6.3 Any potential conflicts of interest that could affect how AI technologies are used or interpreted should also be declared.
- 6.4 Completed use cases and related records form part of the institutional audit trail and may be reviewed by the REF Oversight Board or made available to external regulators if required.

7. Training

- 7.1 Staff involved in the development of REF submissions will be supported through training on:
- Responsible practice (ethics, data governance, REF principles)
 - Practical use (prompt design, evaluation, limitations, avoiding over-optimisation and appropriate use of digital technologies, including use of institutionally hosted or local models, where this supports data protection, reproducibility and environmental sustainability).
 - Critical engagement (equity, peer challenge, triangulation).
- 7.2 Training will be delivered through a combination of online modules, in-person workshops and tailored guidance sessions. Participation will be required for all staff directly involved in REF submission development.

8. Guiding questions for ethical AI Use

- 8.1 When using AI technologies in REF submission development, staff are encouraged to reflect on the following:
- **Transparency and understanding:** *Do I understand what the tool is doing and how it may influence my interpretation or decisions?*
 - **Reproducibility:** *Could others replicate this digitally supported process and reach the same outcome?*
 - **Critical engagement:** *Have I reviewed tool-generated suggestions critically and applied my own judgement?*
 - **Equity and inclusion:** *Could this unintentionally disadvantage particular disciplines, research types or contributors?*
 - **Upholding REF principles:** *Does this strengthen rigour, fairness or transparency in the submission development process or could it undermine them?*

9. Process for Raising Concerns

- 9.1 Staff are encouraged to raise any concerns about the use of AI or other digital technologies, particularly if they believe it may lead to exclusion, misrepresentation or harm, by emailing the REF Team at ref-help@bristol.ac.uk. All concerns will be handled confidentially. Emails should briefly outline the use in question and the nature of the concern.
- 9.2 The REF Team will acknowledge receipt within five working days. Concerns will be reviewed by the REF Team and, where appropriate, routed to the relevant UoA lead, professional services lead or the REF Oversight Board. A small panel (including a representative from the REF Team, a UoA or service lead and a member of the REF Oversight Board) will aim to review concerns within ten working days. Outcomes will be communicated to the staff member along with any actions taken or recommendations made.

10. Review

- 10.1 These guidelines will be reviewed annually by the REF Oversight Board to ensure they remain current and responsive to developments in AI technologies, sector policy and institutional practice. Input will be sought from those involved in REF submission development to support continuous improvement and relevance.

10.2 The REF Oversight Board will consider whether a standardised approach to documenting code and models, including approved repositories and metadata standards, is required for REF audit purposes.

Acknowledgement: This document was developed with the support of generative AI technologies, including ChatGPT (GPT-4o and GPT-5) and Microsoft Copilot, through an iterative process of drafting and refinement in July and August 2025. No single prompt was used; rather, the content evolved through a structured conversation guided by Helen Young, who reviewed, edited and shaped the document to ensure alignment with institutional values, sector guidance and REF 2029 requirements. Input on the evolving draft was given by Peter Ibberson, James Wilson, Matthew Wells and David Forber *[more acknowledgments to be added as these guidelines develop]*.

Appendix A

Use Case Pro Forma: responsible use of AI and digital technologies for REF 2029

SECTION 1: General details

1.1 What is the title of this proposed use? *e.g. Summarising staff consultation feedback for PCE statement.*

1.2 What decision or outcome is it meant to support? *e.g. Help draft an initial narrative outline.*

1.3 What tool(s) will be used (include approval status and release date/version)? *e.g. Microsoft Copilot, institutionally approved, GPT-5 architecture (August 2025 release).*

SECTION 2: Method

2.1 What data or inputs will be used? *e.g. Anonymised staff survey responses, PURE publication records.*

2.2 How will the tool process this information? *e.g. Grouping free-text responses by theme, generating a bullet-point summary.*

2.3 If using code/models, how will reproducibility be ensured? *e.g. version-controlled repository, metadata stored. You do not need to paste code here, just say how it is being managed.*

SECTION 3: Oversight and responsibility

3.1 Who will review and interpret the results (role/team) *e.g. UoA Coordinator and Faculty REF Director.*

3.2 How will human judgement be applied? *e.g. Staff will validate themes, decide relevance and re-draft narrative text.*

SECTION 4: Risks and equity

4.1 Could this use introduce bias, exclusion or misrepresentation? (e.g. *Risk that free-text summaries under-represent minority views.*

4.2 How will these risks be managed? e.g. *Manual spot-checks, second reviewer, inclusion of verbatim examples.*

SECTION 5: Alignment with University guidelines (tick all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Human oversight and sign-off in place | ☐ Interpretative, not determinative use |
| ☐ Transparent / explainable to users | ☐ Risks considered and mitigated |
| ☐ Complies with data governance (no sensitive data processed insecurely) | |
| ☐ Supports equity and inclusion | ☐ Environmental impact proportionate |

SECTION 6: Risk level (choose Low / Medium / High, using the examples provided)

☐ Low (e.g. *tool is only supporting routine or low-stakes tasks such as summarising transcripts, checking grammar or formatting metadata; errors would be easily spotted by human reviewers; tool is institutionally approved and involves no sensitive data*).

☐ Medium (e.g. *tool is informing decisions that shape submission content such as mapping outputs to UoAs or modelling FTE allocation; errors or bias could affect inclusion/exclusion of research; some technical documentation is needed for reproducibility; tool uses external or partially opaque processes but under controlled conditions*).

☐ High (e.g. *tool is making or strongly influencing decisions about research quality, disciplinary fit or case study eligibility; use could unintentionally disadvantage particular disciplines or staff groups; custom code, machine learning models or external platforms are involved where reproducibility or data governance are harder to guarantee; errors could have significant reputational, compliance or equity consequences*).

If unsure, lean towards the higher category. This helps the REF Oversight Board decide how much review is required.

SECTION 7: Conflicts of interest

7.1 Are there any potential conflicts of interest that could affect how this tool is used, interpreted or overseen? e.g. *staff member involved in developing or promoting the tool; financial or professional interest in a product; overlap with external consultancy work*

- ☐ No known conflicts
- ☐ Yes (please describe briefly):

SECTION 8: Declaration

I confirm that this proposed use of AI or digital technologies has been described accurately and in good faith, that it complies with University policies and REF guidelines, and that appropriate records will be retained for audit if required.

(Digital signature may be provided as typed name and date when submitted via a University account. This will be accepted as equivalent to a physical signature.)

Signature:

Name:

Role:

Date: DD/MM/YYYY

SECTION 9: Governance (for REF Team use only)

9.1 Reference number (format: AI-REF-[Year]-[Sequential no.]-v[Version]): AI-REF-2025- -v

9.2 REF Oversight Board decision: ☐ Approved ☐ Revision required ☐ Not approved

9.3 Date of decision: DD/MM/YYYY

9.4 Review cycle: ☐ One-off use ☐ Ongoing / repeat use ☐ Requires re-review after update

Guidance for completing the AI Use Case Pro Forma

(Responsible use of AI and digital technologies for REF 2029)

This short pro forma ensures that any proposed use of AI or digital technologies in REF preparation is transparent, responsible and auditable if required. It is designed to be light-touch: provide enough information for reasonable assurance, while retaining detailed records locally for audit if necessary.

General notes

- Complete Sections 1–7. Section 8 is for the REF Team / Oversight Board only.
- Keep answers brief and in plain language. Most fields can be answered in 1–3 sentences.
- Use the inline examples as a guide to the level of detail expected.
- You do not need to attach detailed prompts, scripts, or datasets to the form - just confirm they are retained for audit if needed.
- If the same tool or method is used repeatedly in a similar way (e.g. summarising feedback across multiple consultations), a single approved use case can cover multiple instances. Note this in Section 8 (review cycle).

Section-by-Section Guidance

Section 1: General details

- Provide a short, descriptive title (e.g. “Summarising staff consultation feedback”).
- State the purpose clearly: what decision or outcome will the tool help with?
- List the tool(s) (name, version, approval status). If not institutionally approved, note that approval has been requested.

Section 2: Method

- Identify the data/inputs (e.g. PURE records, HESA data, anonymised survey responses).
- Describe in plain terms how the tool will process this (e.g. summarising, classifying, modelling, generating prompts).
- If using code/models, outline how reproducibility will be ensured (e.g. version-controlled repository, metadata stored). You do not need to provide the code itself in this form, just confirm how it is being retained.

Section 3: Oversight and responsibility

- Name the role/team who will check and interpret the results (not just “the tool”).
- Explain briefly how human judgement will be applied (e.g. validating outputs, redrafting narrative text, making the final selection decision).

Section 4: Risks and equity

- Identify any risks of bias, exclusion, or misrepresentation (e.g. under-representation of certain disciplines, over-reliance on automated summaries).
- Describe how you will mitigate them (e.g. spot checks, diverse review panels, peer validation, triangulating with other evidence).

Section 5: Alignment with University guidelines

- Tick all boxes that apply.
- Add a short comment if needed (e.g. “Environmental impact minimal as tool is institutionally hosted”).

Section 6: Risk level

- Choose Low / Medium / High, using the examples provided.
- If in doubt, select the higher category to ensure proportionate review by the REF Oversight Board.

Section 7: Conflicts of interest

- Declare any potential conflicts of interest that could affect how the tool is used, interpreted, or overseen.
- Examples include:
 - Personal involvement in developing or promoting the tool.
 - Financial or professional interest in a specific product or vendor.
 - External consultancy work linked to the tool or method.
- If no conflicts are known, tick “No conflicts.” If there are, describe briefly so they can be managed transparently.

Section 8: Submission

- Complete the declaration by typing your name, role, and date.
- Digital signatures are accepted: typing your name and date when submitting via your University account counts as a valid signature.
- Keep all supporting records (prompts, code, datasets, configuration notes) locally - you may be asked to produce them if audited.

Section 9: Governance (for REF Team use only)

- This section will be completed by the REF Team, who administer the REF Oversight Board's processes.
- Each use case will be assigned a reference number (AI-REF-[Year]-[Sequential number]-v[Version]) and appropriate records kept.
- The REF Team will log the reference number and archive the form in the central repository.
- The REF Oversight Board, via the REF Team, will record the decision, review cycle and ensure appropriate records are kept.

Key Principles

- **Transparency:** Be clear about what tool is used and why.
- **Human oversight:** The tool must not replace academic/professional judgement.
- **Equity:** Check that use does not disadvantage disciplines, staff groups, or research types.
- **Proportionality:** Documentation should be proportionate to the risk of the use case.
- **Retention:** Keep records locally for 5 years; you don't need to submit everything, only the form.