

REF2029

Research Excellence Framework

Code of Practice

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2	7 th April 2026	Full version including comments from colleague and union consultation	
2.1	15 th April 2026	Full version including comments from UEB	UEB & Senate

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Glossary of Terms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CoP	Code of Practice
CKU	Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding
CRIS	Current Research Information System
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
EDP	Enterprise Data Protection
EIA	Equality Impact Assessment
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HoFR	Heads of Faculty Research
NUAcT	Newcastle University Academic Track
RI	Research Independent / Research Independence
RPIE	Research Policy Intelligence and Ethics
SRA	Senior Research Associate
SRR	Significant Responsibility for Research
SPRE	Strategy, People and Research Environment
UEB	University Executive Board
UoA	Unit of Assessment

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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) wishing to make a submission to REF 2029 must have a Code of Practice (CoP) approved by the funding bodies. The CoP must cover how HEIs will make key decisions about their submission to the exercise in the following areas: identifying contracts that will contribute to volume measure, allocation of contracts to Units of Assessment (UoA), and selection of research outputs.

The University has developed this CoP in accordance with associated guidance provided by the REF team at Research England. Principles and policies from the University's REF 2021 CoP have been used as a basis for this version.

The REF 2029 guidance on the code of practice has identified the following principles for the shaping and development of institutional CoPs:

- **Robustness:** *submissions should be an accurate reflection of the sector. This supports confidence in the outcomes of the REF and related funding.*
- **Transparency:** *people should understand how decisions about submissions are made and that fair process is followed. Transparent processes help reassure the sector that the same rules are being followed everywhere.*
- **Equity and inclusion:** *decisions about submissions should be fair and impartial, supporting a diversity of people and research. The CoP promotes inclusive research environments where diverse individuals and research contributions are valued and supported and recognises the wide range of research, roles and people that are essential to promoting an inclusive research environment and ensuring the vitality of the UK's vibrant research system.*

REF 2029 guidance also notes that, due to changes being implemented (for instance around calculation of the volume measure) and unlike in previous REF exercises, it is expected that CoPs will be 'living documents' that may require revision following initial submission.

The University embraces the REF 2029 principles and these have been used, in conjunction with our existing policies and procedures, to define our CoP.

After approval from Research England this CoP will be published on the intranet and on the University's external facing web pages.

1.2 Purpose and Principles

In REF 2021 the University adopted a principle we called '*Collective Excellence*'. Our approach was to remove any individual incentives (actual or perceived) associated with the REF and to move to an inclusive and collective assessment of research within each UoA. The University welcomes the further decoupling of research outputs from individuals in REF 2029 and allows us to build on philosophy of 'collective excellence'. Reaffirming the principles behind this we will ensure that:

- Colleagues are on a contract that accurately reflects their role
- No colleague will be advantaged or disadvantaged for inclusion in the volume measure
- No colleague will be advantaged or disadvantaged for having an output or impact submitted to the REF.

We also restate our fundamental doctrine: the REF is not a 'performance management tool' and will not be used as such.

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The University's approach is one of inclusion to ensure that we represent the excellence and breadth of research undertaken at our institution. We are also sensitive to the perceived precarity of certain areas and disciplines and endeavour to support these as part of our diverse research base. In line with these principles, for REF 2029, the University undertakes to:

- Submit all contracts with a significant responsibility for research (see section 2)
- Submit all contracts with Research Independence (RI) (see section 3)
- Set out a formal, fair, consistent and transparent process for the selection of outputs
- Train those involved in the submission process on issues of equality, diversity and inclusion (see section 1.9)
- Provide guidance and advice on the responsible use of metrics in research assessment.

In line with the principles of transparency, equity and inclusion colleagues can, and are at liberty to, check their contract details in the personal information section of the University's Current Research Information System (CRIS). Colleagues who believe their information is incorrect should follow the amendment guidance within the CRIS. Any colleagues with queries or questions regarding the CRIS should contact the Research Policy Intelligence and Ethics (RPIE) team.

The responsibility of nominating outputs and developing impact lies with all colleagues.

Information held purely for the purposes of REF will be handled and stored in accordance with our data collection and privacy statement (see **Error! Reference source not found.**Appendix B)

1.3 Use of generative AI in REF 2029

Generative AI is now an inevitable element of our working practices and it offers the opportunity to dramatically reduce burden particularly within the REF exercise. That said, the use of generative AI comes with many concerns: inherent biases, ethical use, reproducibility, confidentiality and sustainability considerations must all be taken into account. With these in mind, the University deems it prudent to make an explicit stance on generative AI usage within our REF processes. Whilst there has been no direct guidance from the REF team we do acknowledge the REF AI project ([Research: REF-AI project | Centre for Higher Education Transformations](#)) which provides a basis for our REF AI rubric.

We will adhere to the following principles:

- i. Generative AI tools will only be used to supplement (not supplant) human input and oversight on REF processes. Generative AI may be used to inform planning but will not be used to make any decisions on REF matters.
- ii. Usage of generative AI in relation to REF processes must be recorded.
- iii. Third-party generative AI (e.g. Copilot, ChatGPT) must not be used where proprietary information is involved (e.g. in relation to impact case studies).
- iv. Where third-party generative AI is used this must always be with a licensed version containing Enterprise Data Protection (EDP).
- v. Before using generative AI, the advantages (e.g. time saving) must be weighed against the disadvantages (e.g. lack of reproducibility).

As well as having these guidelines our usage of generative AI will be in line with current UKRI guidelines and internal University policy. As generative AI developments can move quickly we will continue to monitor these guidelines.

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1.4 Communication and Consultation

The University will ensure that colleagues are informed of key stages in REF preparation. Broader, University-wide communications are addressed to all colleagues through our internal bulletin NUCConnect.

Information will also be provided via the intranet: [REF2029 NU Intranet](#), news items and via various forums and meetings. The intranet site will also include a detailed timeline and links to relevant documentation held at both Research England and the University.

Colleagues will be consulted at appropriate stages throughout the process. All colleagues (regardless of their role), and relevant Trade Unions, will have been invited to participate in consultation on this CoP.

Colleagues who are absent from the University (e.g. on parental leave or long-term sick) can access the internal information at their convenience.

As with REF 2021 a team workspace has been defined (using Microsoft Teams) to facilitate communication and collaborative working between all UoAs. The workspace is for all REF matters and provides a channel between REF steering group members and UoA coordinators. The workspace is administered by the University's REF Manager.

1.5 Legislative context

The Equality Act 2010 harmonised and consolidated previous anti-discrimination legislation. Most of the Act, as it relates to public functions and employment, came into force in October 2010. The Public Sector Equality Duty of the Act (section 149), which is relevant to HEIs, came into force in April 2011.

In carrying out REF submission processes, the University will give due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

In order to show compliance with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty, the University will ensure that its REF submission procedures do not discriminate unlawfully against individuals because of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

In addition, there is employment law protecting colleagues employed on either Part-Time or Fixed-term contracts. The relevant regulations are:

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- Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000
- Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002

In essence, the law protects colleagues employed in these ways from suffering a detriment compared with colleagues on Full-time or Open-ended contracts. The University will ensure that, in line with employment law, its REF submission procedures do not discriminate against individuals because they are on Part-time or Fixed-term contracts.

1.6 Equity and Inclusion

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) together are recognised as one of the University's values. We are dedicated to developing a culture that is positive, inclusive, and supportive, where all can contribute and within which all can reach their full potential. Working together to foster an inclusive environment in which every individual feels valued, empowers individuals and will enable the University to fulfil its vision to become a more globally inclusive institution.

We set out here the University's overall commitment to EDI as a context for our work for REF2029, followed by specific actions we will take to ensure these commitments are embedded in our REF processes.

Our commitment is underpinned by the University's EDI Strategy (published March 2020) which guides our efforts to ensure that both colleagues and students thrive in a values-led environment. We value the diversity that individual differences bring and want to ensure that no one is at a disadvantage because of who they are or how they identify themselves.

Our commitment to EDI extends beyond our duties under the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty. Fronted by the EDI team, with the support of our Executive Board, work is ongoing with all departments to embed EDI principles and cultivate a culture of inclusion through:

- supporting and promoting colleague networks
- investing in and learning from innovative activities through a University fund specifically to support EDI initiatives
- developing a range of resources and training to promote inclusive practices
- engaging with and implementing national EDI charters
- publishing equality objectives and annual EDI reports
- running dedicated working groups, events, and projects

We have recently published our equality objectives for 2025-2029. Development of these objectives was done in consultation with stakeholders including the University EDI Committee, and with an overview of current and planned EDI work and include the following:

- Further develop an inclusive culture and one which does not tolerate hate crime, discrimination, victimisation or harassment.
- Increase representation of underrepresented protected characteristic groups among professional service and academic colleagues, governing boards, and decision-making committees.
- Improve the progression of academic and professional service colleagues from protected characteristic groups into senior positions where underrepresentation has been identified.
- Increase representation of underrepresented protected characteristic groups among students and ensure equity in the student experience and graduate outcomes.

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- Further enhance our position as a family-friendly organisation.
- Embed EDI in all our processes, policies, decision-making and governance.
- Progress developments in systems and processes relating to EDI data capture, analysis, and reporting.

In recognition of progress we've made, we currently hold an Institutional Gold Athena Swan Award, a Race Equality Charter Bronze Award, and Disability Confident Level 2. We have also recently renewed our University of Sanctuary status, being commended for our good practice and work in this area.

Specifically regarding REF2029, the University will conduct equality impact assessments (EIAs) of the REF submission process at key stages throughout its preparation in order to identify if any protected groups could suffer an adverse impact as a result of the REF processes. See Appendix A.

Moreover, the EIA will be an ongoing process throughout the REF submission period. The University will publish the latest data and commentary relating to the EIA on the internal REF website ([REF2029 NU Intranet](#)) allowing colleagues to provide comments and feedback throughout the REF period. The University will also make the results publicly available after the REF submission.

1.7 Equity and Inclusion Actions since REF 2021

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, we have worked to actively develop our EDI policies and practices, for instance by enacting recommendations we identified as part of our EIA process completed following our submission to REF 2021. Recognising the importance of putting research culture and people at the heart of our research strategy, the University appointed a Dean of Research Strategy and Culture in 2020. This role has subsequently been developed and expanded and is currently a Deanship of Culture and Inclusion. In 2024 we appointed an Associate Dean of Good Research Practice to champion and promote open research, research ethics and integrity, and the responsible use of research metrics.

We have implemented dedicated programmes, training, and support to improve our culture and environment for all colleagues. These include:

- Returners Support Program (for those returning from extended parental leave)
- A new Family Time Policy (including provision for miscarriage and fertility treatments)
- A workplace adjustments campaign
- A new wellbeing manager training module (to encourage more open, honest conversations)
- The development of a colleague wellbeing team
- NU Carers Network
- Joined 'Employer for Carers' forum.

We have also continued our work to make our larger suite of policies clearer, more accessible, and more inclusive.

1.8 Governance

Senate has ultimate responsibility for the University's submission to the REF. Operational responsibility is delegated to the University Research and Innovation Committee (URIC) via Senate, with sign off responsibility lying with the University's Executive Board (UEB). To effectively manage the REF submission URIC has set up a REF Steering Group (SG).

REF SG membership comprises:

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- Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation
- Faculty Deans of Research and Innovation (including Deputy and Assistant Deans)
- Director of Research and Innovation
- Heads of Faculty Research (including Deputies)
- Faculty Research and Impact Managers
- Dean of Culture and Inclusion
- Director of People Services
- Head of Collections, Management, and Digital Library Services

In attendance:

- REF Manager

The REF SG coordinates all aspects of the REF submission including:

- advising UEB on strategic issues and direction
- advising UoA coordinators and Academic Units on operational and strategic issues
- proposals concerning the UoAs to which the University might make a submission
- recommendations for the determination of Research Independence
- co-ordination of the required policies and documentation
- policies on internal assessment of outputs (and external advice, if taken)
- collecting, checking, validating data
- preparation of institutional level statements.

The REF SG will make recommendations for the submission to URIC and Senate, and UEB, after full discussion with the faculties.

The REF SG is advised and supported by the following groups:

- Administrative and Technical Support team, comprising
 - Director of Research and Innovation
 - REF Manager and members of the Research Policy Intelligence and Ethics team (RPIE)
 - REF Data Group (including colleagues from Grants and Contracts, Library, Student Services, Planning and People Services)
- EDI Team and the Dean of Culture and Inclusion who advise on EDI matters and associated training.
- Faculty Management Team for each Faculty, comprising
 - Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor
 - Dean of Research and Innovation
 - Head of Faculty Research or Faculty nominee
- Faculty REF Steering Groups, chaired by Faculty Dean of Research & Innovation, which provide advice to Faculty Management Teams on all REF related matters.

It is the responsibility of each Faculty Management Team to work with Faculty REF Steering Group and UoA teams in the respective Faculties on the detail of the following:

- proposals concerning the UoAs to which the University might make a submission

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- recommendations for the identification of Research Independent contracts according to the criteria.
- confirming records which will allow the University and Research England to verify grant income and PGR numbers

UoA Teams are led by UoA Co-ordinators. The role descriptor for UoA Coordinators can be found in Appendix C.

- UoA Teams are responsible for:
 - determining whether contracts are research independent
 - allocation of contracts to the UoA
 - preparing REF documentation:
 - Research outputs
 - Impact case studies
 - Strategy, People, and Research Environment (SPRE) unit-level statements

Each of the groups involved in decision-making are required to adhere to this Code of Practice and take into account the Public Sector Equality Duty set out at section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. Members of each group will receive REF-specific EDI training or briefing as appropriate (see section 1.9). Further information on the membership and remit of each committee is provided in Appendix D.

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The structure of REF management is shown in figure 1.

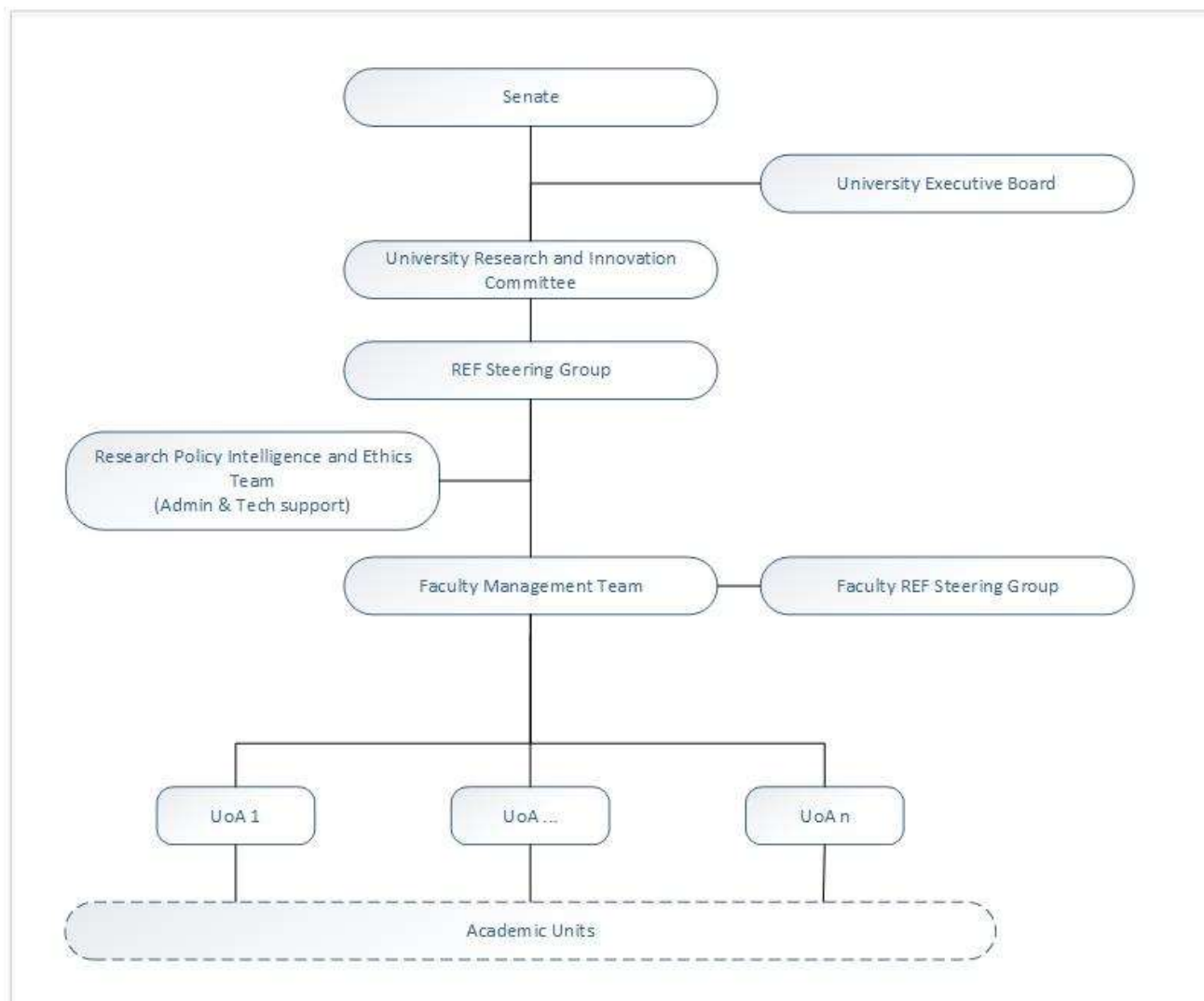


Figure 1: REF management (Note: the dashed box for Academic Unit indicates that the volume measure can be determined from contracts spanning more than one Academic Unit)

The key decision makers and the methods of appointment are set out in Appendix E.

1.9 Training

After the REF 'Initial Decisions' were announced the University planned and implemented appropriate EDI training for those involved in assessing, selecting and administering REF submissions. Pilot REF EDI sessions started in July 2024 and were delivered, in person, including the contributions of an external consultant. The materials have been further developed and while the sessions are still in person they are now delivered by the University's EDI training Lead. The training has been designed to support understanding and mitigate potential biases affecting REF decision-making processes. As such the training

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is mandated for all colleagues involved in REF preparation and REF decision making (including colleagues involved in internal quality assessment). Attendance is monitored by HoFR to ensure all relevant colleagues attend training.

With the majority of relevant colleagues already having attended the training during 2024-25, the focus moved to develop online facilitated training sessions and self-paced course materials to enable all relevant colleagues to access the training.

This training complements the University's 'Essentials' EDI training which is mandatory for all colleagues.

Training on the 'Responsible use of research metrics' was launched in March 2026. Now it has been implemented it will be undertaken by those involved in REF preparation and decision-making processes as appropriate to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the University's expectations and good practice. Attendance will be monitored by HoFR and the RPIE team to ensure all relevant colleagues attend training.

The Newcastle University policy statement on the responsible use of research metrics can be found online here: [Research Metrics | Our Research | Newcastle University](#) and also in Appendix F.

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

In keeping with our philosophies of collective excellence, transparency, and inclusion the University deems all Teaching and Research (T&R) contracts (ACEMPFUN 3) as having Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR).

3. Determining Research Independence (RI)

3.1 Overview

According to Research England guidance, for research only (ACEMPFUN 2) contracts to contribute to the volume measure they must demonstrate research independence (RI). For the purposes of REF 2029, colleagues on research only contracts demonstrate independence if they undertake self-directed research, rather than carrying out another individual's research programme.

3.2 Criteria

The indicators for research independence (as specified in the Research England REF 2029 guidance for all main panels) are contracts where the colleague:

- *acts as lead applicant on externally funded research projects*
- *holds an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship requiring research independence. An illustrative, but not exhaustive, list of Research Fellowships demonstrating research independence can be found at: [Research Fellowships demonstrating research independence for REF 2029 volume measure – REF 2029](#).*
- *leads a research group or a substantial/specialised work package*
- *where research independence is an inherent expectation of a contract*
- *for UoAs 13-34 this may also include:*
 - *being named as a co-applicant on an externally funded research grant/award*
 - *having significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research.*

In addition to the above criteria the University will also consider appointment as a primary PhD supervisor to be an indicator of research independence.

The University supports research-only colleagues through several fellowship programmes, including Newcastle University Academic Track (NUAcT) Fellowships and Faculty Fellowships. Due to the nature (and selection criteria) researchers on the NUAcT programme are deemed to be working as independent researchers. Other University-funded fellows will be assessed on the criteria above.

Determining RI for colleagues employed at the University as Senior Research Associates (SRAs) is not always straightforward due to the breadth and diversity of the work they do and disciplinary nuances. Many of our SRAs will be 'working independently' according to the criteria set out above, but others will not. Therefore, in line with the principles of robustness, transparency and equity, the University will consider each SRA contract on a case-by-case basis. The REF SG will conduct a calibration exercise on all SRA contracts. It is important to stress that determining the volume measure is purely a REF exercise, so anyone on an SRA contract who is determined not to be RI will not be disadvantaged because of this.

3.3 Process

For the 24/25 pilot of the HESA staff return the University developed an interim CoP. In this CoP the University defined the criteria set out above to determine RI. In order to complete the 24/25 pilot HESA staff

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return HoFR, supported by UoA coordinators, used the generic criteria to identify those colleagues working as independent researchers. Although RI is persistent (REF Volume Measure guidance, 9.3) the University will revisit all allocations made in the pilot year. This is to reflect the outcome of the EIA on the 24/25 pilot data and to ensure robustness of the appropriate (and refined) criteria. For the 26/27 HESA staff return all colleagues who have already been determined as having RI in the 25/26 HESA staff return will retain this status.

For coming years, in anticipation of continuous volume calculation, HoFR with support from UoA coordinators will monitor colleagues on research only contracts who have not been determined to be RI. Particularly attention will be given to colleagues joining the University on a research-only contract.

To aid in the management and monitoring of the REF elements of the HESA staff return a PowerBI dashboard has been created. This provides up-to-date management information on all aspects of the REF volume measure elements. Discrepancies are identified through a series of exception reports and colleagues starting on a new research-only contract are highlighted for a RI evaluation.

To reaffirm our commitment to 'collective excellence', inclusion in the REF volume measure (i.e. having RI) is not recognised by the University as an accolade, and has been specifically detached from recruitment, retention, reward and recognition processes. Colleagues will see no detriment for not being included in the REF volume measure (i.e. not being deemed RI). Colleagues can however check their RI status should they so wish. This can be done via our CRIS; colleagues on a research-only contract with RI will be associated with a UoA for purposes of determining the volume measure; whereas those colleagues who have not been determined as being RI will not be allotted a UoA. Colleagues wishing to question their RI status should follow the appeals process outlined below.

To ensure the REF elements of the HESA staff return are an accurate representation of the volume measure extra governance checks will be built into the process. The final approval of the HESA staff return will now include authorisation from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation.

3.4 Staff, Committees, and Training

See section 1.8 for details about the colleagues and committees involved in decision making, and section 1.9 for details regarding training.

3.5 Appeals

The University stands by its commitment that there will be no detrimental implications for a colleague who is not included in the REF volume measure. We also understand that even with this assurance being well defined, colleagues may feel more supported if we have specific REF mechanisms in place. Therefore we have put in place the following appeals process.

Despite having a REF specific appeals process a colleague may feel the standard grievance route is more appropriate. For clarity, a colleague can choose to follow only one of these two appeals process.

Informal Discussion

Any colleague who believes the REF code of practice has not been followed should, in the first instance, discuss the issue informally with their UoA coordinator. If the issue is related to the UoA coordinator, then the colleague should discuss it informally with their Faculty Dean of Research and Innovation. In cases where the UoA coordinator feels they cannot resolve the issue; they should consult with their Faculty Dean of Research and Innovation.

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In cases where the concern cannot be resolved informally, colleagues can request a formal review. Formal reviews can be submitted in writing to the relevant Faculty Dean of Research and Innovation, setting out the nature of the issue and which area of the Code of Practice it pertains to – determination of research independence or UoA allocation. Only colleagues contributing to the volume measure can appeal their UoA allocation. As outputs are now decoupled from individuals, appeals based on output scores or output inclusion will not be considered.

The submission should include any relevant documentation the colleague wishes to be taken into consideration by the panel. The Faculty Dean of Research and Innovation will then refer the matter to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation.

Formal review requests will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation will invite the colleague to discuss their concerns with the REF review panel. This panel will consist of:

- Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Research and Innovation (Chair)
- A Dean of Research and Innovation from a different faculty to that of the colleague requesting the review
- Another member of the REF Steering Group

A People Services representative may also be present in an advisory capacity. Colleagues will be entitled to be accompanied by a representative or a work colleague if they so choose.

Wherever possible, the meeting will be held within 15 working days of receipt and will take place without unreasonable delay. If one of the parties is unexpectedly unable to attend at the notified meeting time, the meeting will be postponed and rescheduled to an alternative time. This will normally be within 5 working days of the original meeting. In the meeting the colleague will be invited to present their grounds for review in full.

Once the formal review is completed, the panel will prepare and send an outcome letter within 10 working days. The letter will outline:

- The nature of the review
- A summary of the discussions
- The decision and the reasons for the outcome
- The right of appeal

Right of appeal

In cases where a colleague wishes to appeal the decision of the REF review panel, they may submit an appeal in writing to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Research and Innovation within 10 working days of the date of the letter confirming the outcome decision. The letter should set out the grounds for the appeal, which are:

- There was a failure to follow the procedure which had a material impact on the outcome
- New information has come to light that should be considered and was not available at the time of the meeting

The appeal is not to undertake a further review, it will only consider the grounds upon which the appeal is based.

The Faculty Dean of Research and Innovation will refer the appeal to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor will convene a REF appeal panel with the advice of PS, this panel will consist of:

- Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Chair)

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- A Dean of the University
- Another senior colleague

All members of the panel will be independent of decisions regarding determining research independence for REF, UoA allocation and will have appropriate training.

The REF appeal panel will invite the colleague to a meeting to discuss their appeal. Wherever possible the meeting will take place within 15 working days of the receipt of appeal and without reasonable delay. A representative from People Services will attend the appeal meeting in an advisory capacity.

The REF appeal panel will ensure that both sides of the case are fully considered.

The decision of the REF appeal panel will be confirmed in writing within 5 working days of the appeal meeting or as soon as reasonably practicable. The appeal outcome letter will state whether the appeal is upheld or rejected and the reasons for the decision. The appeal decision will be final and there is no further right of appeal.

Any changes will be reflected in the next available HESA staff return. For REF 2029 the University will guarantee that all appeals will be concluded before the final eligible HESA staff return (26/27) submission date. In order to achieve this, all formal appeal requests must be lodged by 31st May 2027.

3.6 Equality Impact Assessment

Our Equality Impact Assessment is attached as Appendix A

4. Allocating Contracts to UoAs

4.1 Overview

When a contract has been determined as contributing to the volume measure the contract will be assigned a UoA. The criteria below have been developed to allow for a clear association between the contract and UoA and also to take interdisciplinary research into consideration.

4.2 Criteria

When allocating contracts to UoAs the following criteria will be used:

- The colleague associated with the contract is employed by a Unit that aligns with the research definition of the UoA
And/Or
- At least some research undertaken on the contract fits within the research definition of the UoA

4.3 Process

Heads of Academic Units along with UoA Co-ordinators will review all research related contracts within their respective Unit. Each eligible contract will be assessed and allocated to a UoA in line with the criteria above.

Each colleague on a volume contributing contract will be assigned to a UoA within our Current Research Information System (CRIS). Each non-volume contributing research only contract will be added to an Excel Workbook and the appropriate UoA recorded. This information will feed into the PowerBI dashboards described in section 3.3.

As with RI, colleagues can view the UoA to which they have been allocated via the University's CRIS. Colleagues wishing to challenge their UoA status should follow the appeals process outlined in section 3.5.

4.4 Timeline

4.4.1 Allocating contracts to UoAs (Spring 2026 to Autumn 2026 and Spring 2027 to Autumn 2027)

HoFR will (with the aid of UoA coordinators) ensure relevant contracts are associated with the most appropriate UoA. The monitoring dashboards will be used to identify inconsistencies and omissions.

Faculty recommendations on UoA submissions will be submitted to REF Steering Group and then University Executive Board each Summer. Following broad approval of UoA choices by the REF Steering Group, Faculty Deans of Research and Innovation and HoFR will work to confirm final FTE of each UoA with Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellors, Heads of Academic Unit, Research Directors and UoA Coordinators.

4.4.2 Preparation of the HESA Staff Return (Autumn 2026 and Autumn 2027)

PS colleagues will prepare the HESA Staff Return; the REF elements being provided from the CRIS. The REF relevant information will be displayed/presented in new People Services provided dashboards. The dashboards will provide the assurance that the REF elements are correctly addressed in the HESA Staff Return.

4.4.3 Sign-off of the HESA Staff Return (Autumn 2026 and Autumn 2027)

Final recommendations on UoA choices will be submitted to REF Steering Group and then University Executive Board in late summer. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation will sign-off the HESA Staff Return.

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4.5 Staff, Committees, and Training

See section 1.8 for details about the colleagues and committees involved in decision making, and section 1.9 for details regarding training.

4.6 Appeals

See section 3.5 for the appeals process.

4.7 Equality Impact Assessment

See Appendix A

5. Selecting outputs

5.1 Overview

The University's Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU) will be assessed through the submission of research outputs. The number of outputs is determined by the volume measure, multiplied by 2.5 and rounded to the nearest whole number for each UoA. Unlike previous REF cycles, eligible research outputs do not have to have been authored by colleagues on volume contributing contracts, and where they are, outputs do not have to be submitted to the same UoA as the volume contributing contract. Given this decoupling, eligibility of outputs will be based on a substantive link between the research and the Higher Education Institution (HEI). Maximum and minimum output requirements have been tempered resulting in the latter being removed and the former being a recommended maximum of five; however, output submissions must still be representative of the research conducted within the unit.

5.2 Criteria

REF 2029 CKU guidance states that each output in the submission must meet the following criteria:

- *be the product of research, briefly defined as a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared*
- *have first been brought into the public domain during the publication period 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2028 or, if a confidential report, lodged with the body to whom it is confidential during this same period*
- *have a substantive link to the HEI making the submission*
- *for outputs within scope of the Open Access policy, meet the requirements of that policy.*

The definition of research is unchanged from REF 2021 and includes:

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

5.3 Process

All of the University's outputs (including non-traditional output types) are recorded within our CRIS. The CRIS is used to store all of the information relating to an output including evaluation information. The CRIS can be accessed by all colleagues via the 'Staff Homepage'. Advice and 'how to' guides on the CRIS can be found on the University's intranet.

At various junctures through the REF cycle, colleagues will be invited to self-select their 'REF-best' outputs. All nominated outputs will be given a star-rating (score) and if appropriate a granular score, through a process of quality peer review. Outputs will be scored, predominately through internal peer review, against the published REF criteria. Reviewers will have the appropriate research expertise and the appropriate training, particularly around unconscious biases (see section 1.9). Outputs will be initially assessed in the UoA most closely associated with the nominating author.

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In line with the principle of transparency colleagues are able to view final scores (with granular scores) relating to their own individual research outputs in the CRIS.

It is expected that the majority of outputs will be assessed utilising expertise from within the University. However, there may be certain areas where we do not have the required expertise for internal quality assessment, in these cases we will look to expertise outside of the University.

As a signatory of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), all contributions will be assessed and considered for inclusion in line with the principles of responsible research assessment. The University is committed to the responsible use of research metrics as part of our research culture and research strategy. We advocate for the transparent, appropriate, and inclusive use of metrics, guided by expert judgment, to support high-quality, impactful research that is open, collaborative and sustainable. This work is supported by our Associate Dean for Good Research Practice. In addition, the University has developed training in the Responsible Use of Research Metrics. This is mandatory for those involved in REF preparations/assessment. The full policy statement on the Responsible use of Research Metrics can be found in Appendix F.

Outputs that meet the criteria (section 5.2), are assessed of being of highest quality according to our review processes, and that best represent the discipline will be selected for inclusion.

5.4 Assigning outputs to UoAs

Outputs will be allocated to the UoA deemed most suitable considering: the subject matter, UoA descriptors, our principle of collective excellence, and REF guidelines. Our aim will be to ensure that our submission of outputs provides a true representation of the diversity and excellence of the research undertaken within the institution.

Decoupling provides opportunities for outputs to be submitted to the most appropriate UoA, or to multiple UoAs. As such, authors and reviewers (particularly those working in interdisciplinary areas) will be encouraged to consider the UoA (or UoAs) to which the output would be best suited.

5.5 Substantive link to outputs

5.5.1 Context:

HEIs must have enabled the research leading to an output first made publicly available during the output eligibility period. A 'substantive link' is evidenced through *'an eligible employment relationship with an author (or equivalent) who has made a significant research contribution to the output'*.

According to the REF 2029 guidance, eligible employment relationships are defined as:

- *A minimum of 0.2 FTE for at least 12 months continuous employment (as defined by Section 210 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA 1996) or the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996) by the HEI making the submission. Continuous employment may be demonstrated by a sequence of consecutive contracts*

AND

- *The role descriptor includes an explicit expectation of research activity (as distinct from scholarship) within the role. 'Research activity' is not restricted by profession and an eligible employment relationship may be with any staff member who undertakes, enables or supports research.*

An eligible employment relationship must have occurred either:

- *At the point at which the submitted output was first made publicly available*
- OR**

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- *Before the submitted output was first made publicly available, when the research resulting in the output was carried out.*

As per the guidance, outputs sole-authored, or where the only substantive link is through the following groups are not eligible for submission:

- *postgraduate research students (including PhD theses)*
- *visiting or honorary staff*
- *staff on teaching only contracts (that is, those returned to the HESA Staff record as ACEMPFUN.01)*
- *individuals employed on academic or other contracts with no explicit expectation of research within the job role, technical teaching or support only contract.*

Where the University has provided allocated time and funding to support research activity for the latter two of these groups, an exception may be applied for from the Research England REF director for submission. It is expected that these cases will be limited, but colleagues in this position who wish to nominate an output or outputs should speak with the HoFR in the first instance.

5.5.2 Application

To ensure the substantive link is associated with an author making a significant research contribution to the output the initial link will be the nominating author. For completeness, all authors with an eligible employment relationship will be listed against the output as a viable substantive link. In certain cases outputs may be selected for inclusion without nomination (e.g. contributions from former colleagues). In these circumstances the most appropriate substantive link will be selected.

5.5.3 Selecting outputs from research enabling colleagues

The University recognises that in REF 2029 outputs may be authored or created by research-enabling staff, e.g. technician, research manager or research software engineer. While this must be evidenced by the contributor holding at least a 0.2 FTE contract with the institution and having 'research activities' as part of their role, colleagues in these roles are encouraged to nominate outputs.

The University appreciates that colleagues in these roles may be less familiar with our standard practices and may even sit outside the academic structures. Any colleague who finds themselves in this position should contact their HoFR or the REF Manager (res.policy@ncl.ac.uk).

5.5.4 Selecting outputs where the substantive link is via former staff

Excluding contributions of former colleagues could jeopardise the representative nature of the University's submission for a discipline. Therefore, as in REF 2021, the University will consider any outputs that meet the criteria in section 5.2 for inclusion in REF 2029. This includes contributions from colleagues who have retired, taken voluntary redundancy or severance, colleagues who left after the expiry of a fixed term contract and colleagues that are in a role which is dependent on fixed term funding.

As stated in the REF guidance 6.7.2 the University will not submit outputs where the substantive link occurred before the submitted output was made publicly available and the author was subject to compulsory redundancy. For all other cases, outputs will be assessed against the relevant criteria but the University will be sensitive to the nature of the particular circumstances.

5.5.5 Statement of representation

To aid in checking the number of outputs linked to contracts, HoFR will be provided with output distributions for each UoA. These reports will give an overview of the UoA from a substantive link perspective. It is envisaged that they may also act as a proxy for how representative the UoA output submission is of the disciplines within the UoA. The HoFR will raise a query with the appropriate UoA Coordinator where:

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- there is a disproportionate number of current contracts not being used as a substantive link
- Or**
- the recommended maximum of five outputs per contract is exceeded.

UoA coordinators will then be responsible for ensuring the substantive links are appropriate and the output submission is a true representation of the research activity. If, after review, either of the conditions above persist then they will be addressed within the 'statement of representation'.

5.5.6 Commitment to decoupling

To fully embrace the principle of decoupling, the University will not inform colleagues if their contract has been used as a substantive link. In addition to the REF submission process, the University will only use the substantive link for the purposes of EIA monitoring (see section 5.5.5).

5.6 Diversity of outputs

The University has always encouraged submitting the most appropriate output type to demonstrate the research. Reaffirming this commitment, the University has pledged to consider all output types on an equal basis. This includes (but is not limited to) outputs in British Sign Language and Welsh. The University acknowledges the wide disciplinary differences in what constitutes a research output and the submission of 'non-traditional' output types is encouraged where appropriate.

5.7 Timeline

5.7.1 Selection and scoring of outputs (Summer 2025 – Autumn 2028)

Colleagues should select proposed research outputs at various points during the process, as directed. This should be done within the CRIS to ensure the information held about their research activity is correct. These self-selected outputs will then be scored via internal review.

Selecting and scoring outputs, and any subsequent review, is undertaken solely to measure the University's progress towards the REF submission in 2028.

Faculty Management Teams will monitor outputs using the CRIS and will review the output selections and scores as and when necessary to determine the University's progress towards the 2028 submission.

5.7.2 Publication of final guidance and panel criteria (Autumn 2026)

Colleagues have been updated on a continual basis on REF developments. Colleagues will be informed when further guidance is made available. Feedback of relevant comments from School/Institute Research Committees is made via Faculty Deans of Research and Innovation to the REF Steering Group for discussion.

5.7.3 Allocating contracts to UoAs (Spring 2026 to Autumn 2026 and Spring 2027 to Autumn 2027)

See section 4.4.

5.7.4 Allocating outputs to UoAs (Autumn 2027 to Summer 2028)

Following peer and faculty level review of output selection and scores, Deans of Research and Innovation will meet with Heads of Academic Unit to discuss results and output allocation. This will ensure outputs are allocated to the most suitable UoA and that the UoA output composition is representative of the research within the unit.

Faculty recommendations on general output allocation will be submitted to REF Steering Group and then University Executive Board in Autumn 2027. Faculties will be asked to show how

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interdisciplinary research is represented and how this has been considered when allocating outputs. Following broad approval of output allocation by the REF Steering Group, Faculty Deans of Research and Innovation and HoFR will refine the composition of each UoA (during Winter 2027/2028) with Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellors, Heads of Academic Unit, Research Directors and UoA Coordinators.

Final recommendations on output composition will be submitted to REF Steering Group and then University Executive Board in Spring 2028.

5.7.5 Preparation of the final submission (Winter 2027/2028 – Autumn 2028)

Faculty Deans of Research and Innovation will make a formal presentation of each UoA submission to University Executive Board in Summer 2028.

Research and Innovation Deans and UoA Coordinators will revise the UoA submissions in the light of University Executive Board's decisions concerning the composition of each UoA, and in the light of further developments in submitted outputs since the last quality review process.

In early autumn 2028, the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation will meet formally with the Faculty Deans of Research and Innovation and Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellors to agree the final draft submission for each of the UoAs in their respective Faculties.

The final submission for each UoA will be agreed by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation and the Vice-Chancellor and President immediately prior to the submission deadline. The Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation will then instruct the Research Policy Intelligence and Ethics Team to formally submit each of the UoA submissions.

5.7.6 Publication of results (December 2029)

Deans of Research and Innovation will visit Academic Units to discuss the results of REF 2029.

5.8 Staff, Committees, and Training

See section 1.8 for details about the colleagues and committees involved in decision making, and section 1.9 for details regarding training.

5.9 Appeals

The appeals process is not applicable for the selection of outputs. For more details see section 3.5.

5.10 Equality Impact Assessment

See Appendix A

6. Appendices

6.1 Appendix A: Equality Impact Assessments

6.1.1 Introduction

As part of our REF2029 Code of Practice and as specified in REF guidance, we will be undertaking Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) to ensure that we address and adhere to our duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty, eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering good relations between all colleagues.

These EIAs will be shared alongside the REF2029 Code of Practice for consultation and engagement with all colleagues. There will be clear avenues for feedback on both the Code of Practice and these EIAs to ensure that we can address any concerns around processes or impact, and feed these into the continuing development of both documents and the processes contained within.

In this document we will undertake EIAs on the following areas:

- Determining Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) and Research Independence (RI)
- Allocation of eligible contracts to Units of Assessment (UoA)
- Selection of outputs
- Managing appeals processes.

6.1.2 Determining SRR and RI

For REF2029, to be included in the volume measure a contract must demonstrate either SRR or RI.

At Newcastle University we have fair and equitable policies for recruitment that apply to everyone and believe that everyone should be on an appropriate contract for their role. In keeping with our philosophies of collective excellence, transparency, and inclusion we deem all those on teaching and research contracts (ACEMPFUN 3) as having SRR.

For those on research-only contracts (ACEMPFUN 2), each contract is considered as to whether it has RI. This is done by Units/UoA teams. Becoming RI is part of an individual researcher's journey and reflects an ongoing process, as such we do not see any benefit or detriment to individuals based on whether their contract is determined to be RI or not. In assessing whether a contract has RI we have used the criteria specified within the CoP.

In our interim CoP developed for the 24/25 HESA staff return, we outlined the criteria and processes that we were piloting. As this was a preliminary attempt at using the HESA staff return for REF purposes and, without full guidance from Research England, we determined that an EIA would be done retrospectively. That way we would be able to fully assess the pilot exercise from a process perspective and using the submitted data.

Evidence

In relation to SRR, as all teaching and research contracts are included, there are no processes involved that could either benefit or disadvantage any group. Our recruitment policy ensures that all those involved in recruitment have undertaken suitable training on inclusion and bias alongside specific recruitment training. Further details on T&R colleagues can be found in the latest EDI annual report here: [annual-edi-gender-pay-gap-report-2025.pdf](#)

In relation to RI, each contract is considered in relation to the criteria above by Units/UoA teams. While we do not envisage there is any benefit or detriment associated with RI, there is the potential for bias and as

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such we can and should monitor the protected characteristics of those employed on research-only contracts, and those identified as having RI to ensure that our criteria and selection processes are fair and equitable.

We have utilised internal data taken from the HESA staff return (the mechanism for recording volume contributing contracts and calculating volume measure) for the pilot year 24/25 to consider the equality profile of all research-only contracts, and those research-only contracts determined to have RI. Based on the criteria 12% of research-only contracts were determined to have RI.

In order to promote Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), the University collects information on the protected characteristics of our colleagues via our Human Resources (HR) database. We have the ability to collect and analyse information relating to sex, disability, age, nationality, ethnic origin, gender reassignment, sexual orientation and religion. Due to disclosure rates in relation to gender reassignment and religion, these data are not considered here. The University also collects information about marriage and civil partnership status on appointment. Information on pregnancy and maternity is collected for women who have reached 26 weeks into their pregnancy.

Of our colleagues, most have chosen to disclose their ethnic origin. However, only a minority of our colleagues have chosen to disclose a disability. Feedback from our Disability Interest group suggest that many colleagues are cautious about informing the University of a disability. The University is running campaigns to encourage the sharing of data around disability and other protected characteristics.

For the analysis below the RI cohort consists of those contracts that have been submitted in the 24/25 pilot HESA staff return. The baseline (or base) used for comparison includes all research-only contracts.

Age

Figure 1 below shows the age profiles of all colleagues on research-only contracts ('Base') compared with those deemed to be RI.

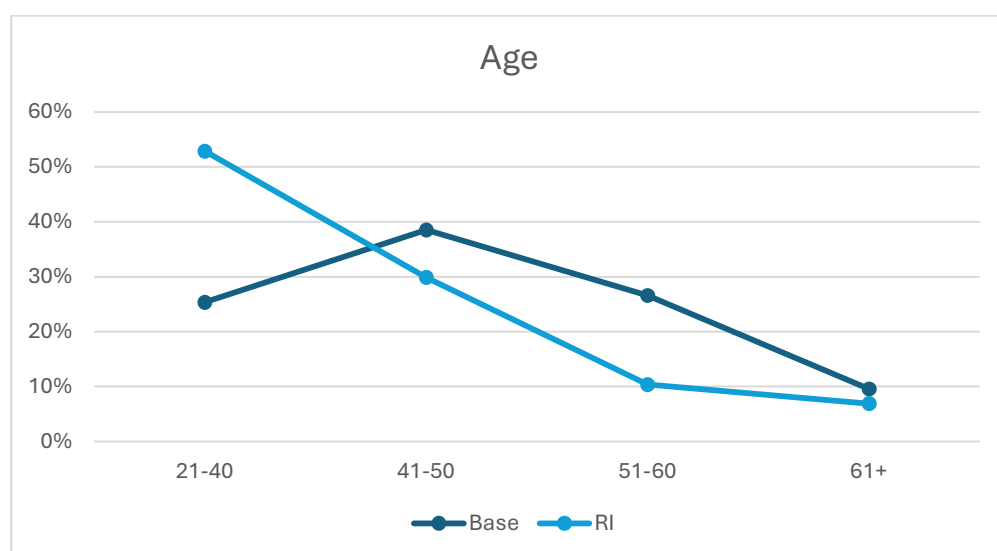


Figure 1: Age distribution

The distribution shows the predominantly younger colleagues have been selected as being RI. This is unexpected as younger researchers, typically taking up their first post-doctoral position, might be thought most likely to be on research-only contracts but not RI. The effect is likely to be distorted in the 21-40 grouping as this hasn't been broken down into a comparable 10-year grouping.

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The greatest underrepresentation of research-only colleagues not deemed RI as compared with the base is for the 51-60 year-old group. Those in the '61+' age are most likely to be established researchers in strategic research positions and so it is expected that the majority of these colleagues are deemed to be RI.

Disability

The distribution of the disability data (figure 2) shows that 5% of colleagues declaring a disability on research-only contracts were defined as independent researchers compared to the baseline of 4%.

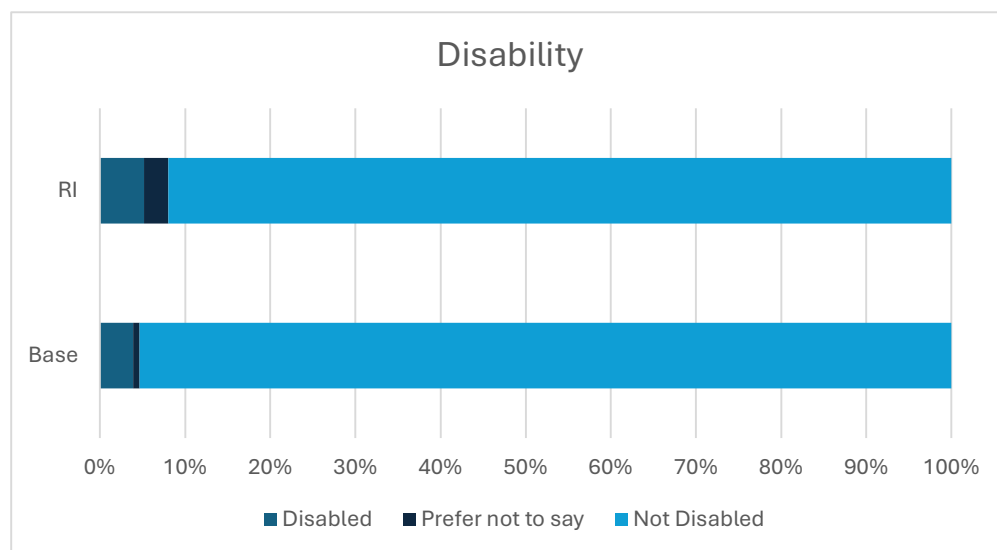


Figure 2: Disability data

Sex

Figure 3 below shows the sex profile.

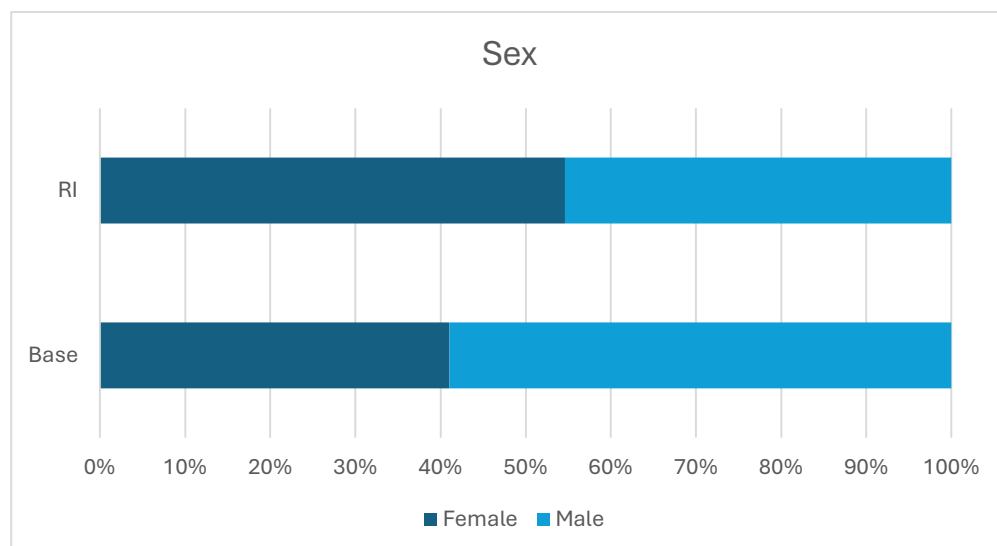


Figure 3: Sex

The sex profile shows more female colleagues having RI (55%) compared to the baseline (41%).

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Working Pattern

For the analysis between full and part time status we used full time equivalent (FTE), with those colleagues working at 100% FTE deemed to be full time and those colleagues working less than 100% FTE (in any capacity) to be part time.

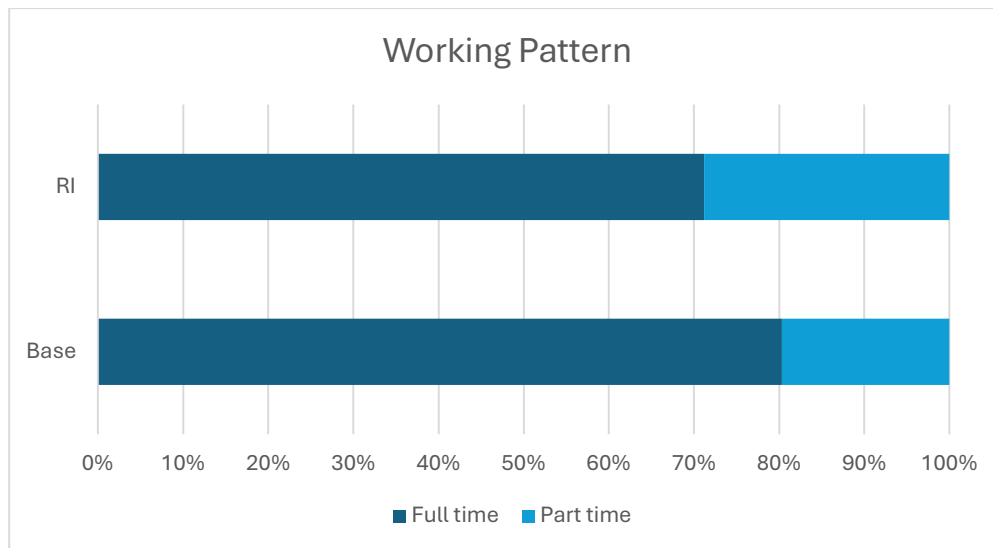


Figure 4: Working pattern

Overall, the figures showed a higher rate of part time workers with more individuals (29%) being defined as RI than the baseline (20%) (Figure 4).

The fact that more part time workers were deemed to be RI than we'd expect from the baseline can be attributed to the demographic on research-only contracts. Those in strategic research positions, who are by definition, RI, are almost always working less than 100% FTE and thus are defined as part time.

Ethnicity

Analysis of the ethnicity data across the university is shown in figure 5.

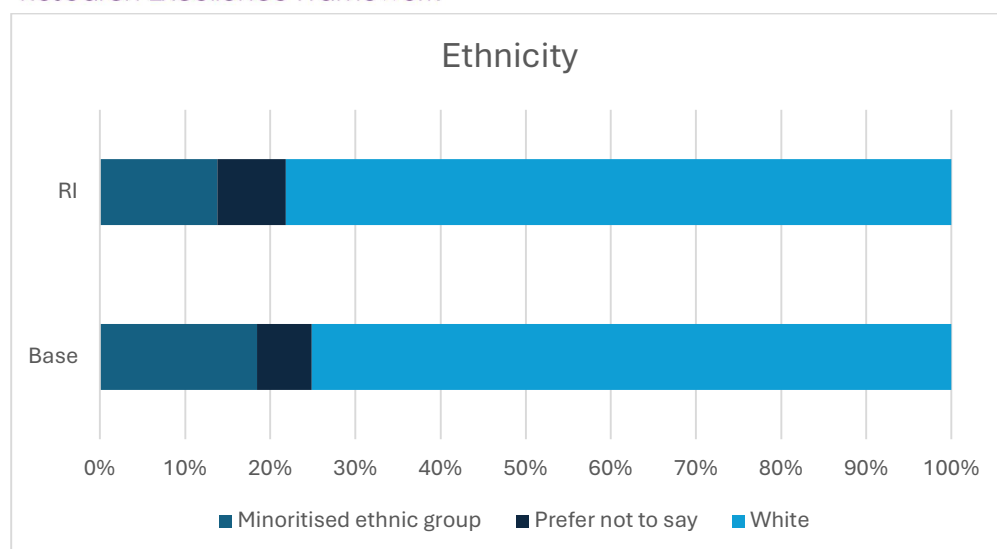


Figure 5: Ethnicity

This shows that 18% of all colleagues who are employed on research-only contracts have declared their ethnicity as Minoritised ethnic group compared to 14% of those who have been determined as RI. Whereas 75% of colleagues have declared their ethnicity as White, with 78% of those who have been determined as RI declaring their ethnicity as White. Despite the small differences we deemed this to be a marked difference and worthy of further analysis at Faculty level. Another reason for considering this further was that we identified similar unbalances in our REF 2021 analysis of ethnicity.

Doing the comparison at the Faculty level, we found that within FMS, 29% of the baseline data are colleagues identifying as Minoritised ethnic group and 9% are independent researchers. HaSS had a differential of 7% (between the higher baseline and lower figure for RI colleagues). In SAgE, we found that there was a larger proportion of colleagues identifying as Minoritised ethnic group (48%) in the baseline but only 23% of Minoritised ethnic group colleagues had been deemed as RI.

Nationality

The analysis of nationality looked at the breakdown of colleagues classified as British and Non-British. The analysis indicated that there appeared to be a significant difference in the proportion of colleagues on a research-only contract compared to those deemed to be RI with regard to nationality. 58% of colleagues on research-only contracts employed at the University identified as British; however of those deemed to be RI, 69% identified as British. For colleagues identifying as non-British, this was reversed with 42% of colleagues on research-only contracts compared with 31% deemed to be RI.

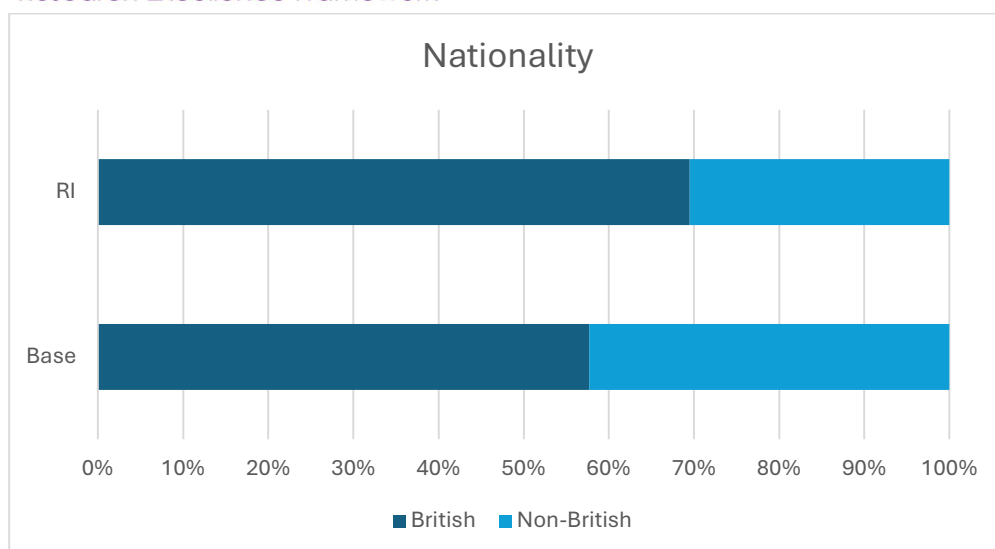


Figure 6: Nationality

Further breakdown at faculty level showed no discernible differences between the faculties.

Marital Status

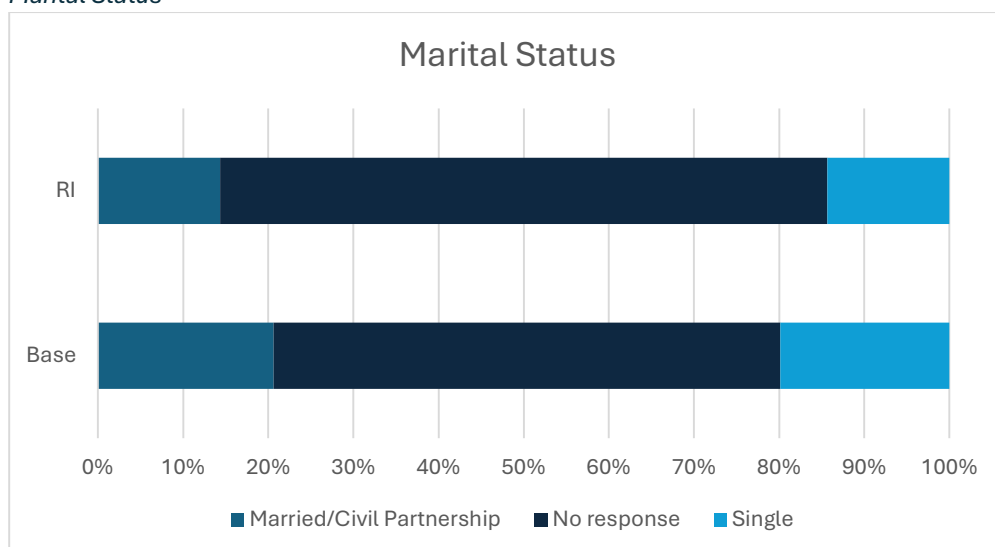


Figure 7: Marital Status

The pattern between the baseline and RI for colleagues who are married/in a civil partnership and those who are single is virtually identical. There are considerably more colleagues (proportionally) with RI not providing a response (71%) compared with the baseline (59%).

Sexual Orientation

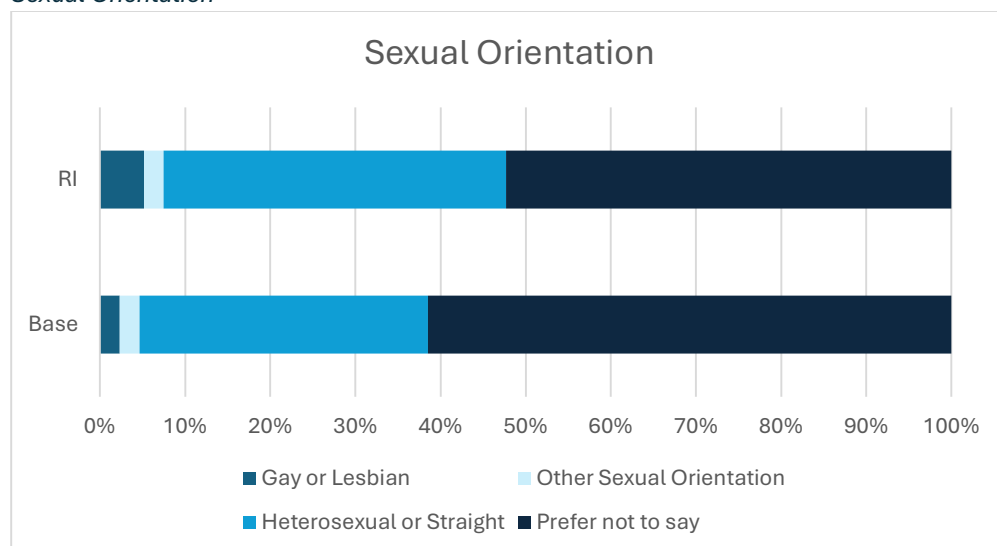


Figure 8: Sexual Orientation

For sexual orientation the largest response was 'Prefer not to say'. For those colleagues who did declare their sexual orientation there were increases in the percentages of 'heterosexual or straight', 'gay or lesbian' in the RI cohort. 'Other sexual orientation' percentage was 2% in the baseline and the RI cohort.

Assessment of Impact

Based on this evidence we consider the impacts to be as follows:

1. Age – Neutral: higher percentage of under 40s/lower percentage of over 40s in RI cohort. Needs further breakdown of the 21-40 age group.
2. Disability – Positive: slightly higher percentage of recorded disability in RI cohort.
3. Sex – Positive: higher percentage of women in RI cohort.
4. Working Pattern: Positive: higher percentage of colleagues working part-time in RI cohort.
5. Ethnicity – Negative: slightly lower percentage of Minoritised ethnic group (slight increase in 'White', slight increase in 'prefer not to say') in RI cohort.
6. Nationality – Negative: slightly lower percentage of 'non-British' colleagues in RI cohort.
7. Marital status – Neutral: higher rate of 'no response' in RI cohort.
8. Sexual orientation – Neutral: 'Prefer not to say' remains highest response, however increase in 'heterosexual or straight' and 'gay or lesbian' percentages in RI cohort.

The data collected does not include information regarding gender affirmation, pregnancy & maternity, or religion or belief so impact in these areas is unknown.

The other main assessment outcome was that the University does not have a clear single source of the HESA staff return. In analysis of the datasets we have minor discrepancies between our HR system, our CRIS, what we thought we submitted and what we received back from RE. In our EIA assessment data we even have different benchmarks, with the Nationality and Working pattern data having a baseline of 1250 compared to the other characteristics having a benchmark of 1464. This is concerning from all perspectives; without accurately knowing our HESA staff return we cannot expect to accurately assess the impact on any particular group.

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Action

The first concern is that of the data inconsistencies. Without accurate data we cannot confidently assess anything. The integrity of the EIA becomes questionable. This has led the University to set up a central group to oversee the return and develop central dashboards to monitor and record the HESA staff return. The University will also now include the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation in the sign-off of the HESA staff return.

Second, nationality and ethnicity of our RI cohort has been a concern since REF 2021. We will focus efforts on assuring and validating these two datasets. If these accurate data show the same patterns as identified above this will be investigated and monitored as the full REF submission is prepared.

Third, in relation to our processes we found that there were different perceptions of the criteria within different Faculties/disciplines. Whilst there are some disciplinary nuances in the criteria it was felt that we needed a calibration, particularly for those contracts that are assessed on a case-by-case basis. This has resulted in the REF SG now having oversight of the outcome of RI on all SRA contracts.

6.1.3 Allocation of eligible contracts to UoA

Heads of Academic Units along with UoA Co-ordinators in each Faculty review all research related contracts within their respective Faculty. Each eligible contract will be assessed and allocated to a UoA in line with the criteria specified in the CoP.

Evidence

All eligible contracts (ACEMPFUN 2 and ACEMPFUN 3) will be allocated to a UoA. While this is a new aspect introduced from decoupling (which means there is no like for like data), REF treats every UoA equally, as does to the University. Therefore, there is no benefit or detriment associated with being allocated to one UoA over another. UoA allocation is solely for the purpose of conducting the REF2029 exercise and has no bearing on any individual, their actions, or circumstances.

Assessment of Impact

This process cannot have any impact as UoAs are all treated equally. There would be no benefit or detriment to any group or colleague from being allocated to any UoA.

Action

None.

6.1.4 Selection of outputs

Although authors can nominate outputs, this is where the association between an output and an individual ends.

In section 1.2 Purpose and Principles of our CoP we outline our principle of 'collective excellence'. We explicitly define that the REF is not a performance management tool and that we will not use the REF in this manner. We have embraced full decoupling and have made the commitment that we will not disclose substantive links to authors (section 5.5.5 Commitment to decoupling). This reinforces the REF principles and ensures that no group can be disadvantaged because of the output selection.

Evidence

As yet we have no data; outputs have not been selected for inclusion in the REF as it too early in the cycle. Please refer to section 1.9 for information in relation to our training preparations for selecting outputs.

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Assessment of Impact

Within the CoP we outline measures to test the representation of a UoA. Whilst these are only a proxy for representation, looking at number of outputs attached (using the substantive link) to current colleagues might give us an understanding of the distribution of outputs across the protected characteristics.

With the self-selection of outputs there are other areas of potential assessment. It might be feasible to compare nominated outputs with outputs selected for submission. And thus these could then be drawn back to the colleagues who nominated the output. There is also the question of the nomination process and the assessment of the numbers nominated by groups. Though at this stage in the REF process these are speculative of the type of assessment we could perhaps undertake.

Action

We will continue with the consultation and collaboration process to ascertain whether there are any data we can gather to support or challenge the current assessment. We will continue to monitor for any adverse or unanticipated outcomes and review this EIA as necessary.

6.1.5 Managing the appeals processes

Our appeals mechanism and process for REF2029 is set out in our REF2029 CoP. The CoP will go through consultation and be disseminated for all colleagues to consider and feedback. The process is clear and considered, ensuring impartiality.

When approved, the CoP will be widely available and will be the central reference point for REF matters. The CoP (and thus the appeals process) will be prominent on the University's intranet.

There were no formal appeals lodged in REF2021 and so we do not have any previous data on patterns of appeals or how appeals were resolved. As the REF2029 cycle progresses we will monitor any formal appeals raised and assess any relevant data to ensure the processes are not producing any disproportionate outcomes for individuals with particular characteristics in relation to RI.

Privacy Notice for Submissions for the Research Excellence Framework (REF)

The information we process

For the purposes of participating in the REF, Newcastle University processes information relating to past and present research colleagues.

1. Current University employees with a primary employment function of “Teaching & Research” and “Research only”. It may also include employees who are research active but not currently on an eligible contract.
2. Former University employees who (at any time during their employment) were REF-eligible at the time of ceasing employment and who have research outputs that were generated while they were employed at the University during the REF assessment period
3. Individuals who are not employed by the University but who have provided testimonials concerning the development of impact case studies in relation to the University’s preparations for the REF 2029 exercise

The lawful basis for processing personal data for REF 2029 is that it is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest under Article 6(1)(e) of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). Participation in the Research Excellence Framework is a national research assessment exercise which supports accountability for public investment in research and informs the allocation of public research funding.

. The categories of information we process are:

- HESA staff identifier and staff number
- Name (initials, forename and surname)
- Date of birth or age-related data, where required for REF eligibility and equality monitoring
- Open researcher and contributor ID (ORCID) (where held).
- Job title/position
- Grade
- Contracted hours/FTE.
- Information about contract type and any secondments/periods of unpaid leave, including dates.
- Whether any personal data should be omitted from the published data for specific reasons, such as commercial sensitivity or security.

Special category information

Where special category personal data are processed, the University relies on Article 9(2)(g) UK GDPR (processing necessary for reasons of substantial public interest), together with Schedule 1, Part 2, paragraph 8 of the Data Protection Act 2018 (equality of opportunity or treatment). This processing is undertaken to monitor equality and diversity in relation to REF participation. An appropriate policy document is in place.

This may include information about protected characteristics, including age, sex or gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, disability, pregnancy and maternity, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.

How we obtain the information

We get information from you, University documents and systems and from third parties including research users.

How long we keep it for

Within the Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE) statements and case studies we may use names and job titles but no other personal information will be used. The SPRE statements and case studies will be published as part of the REF submission. All other personal information collected as part of the REF exercise will be retained for a maximum of seven years.

Who we share it with

The purpose of the Research Excellence Framework 2029 (REF 2029) is to assess the quality of UK research and to inform the selective distribution of public funds for research by the four UK higher education funding bodies. The REF is managed by the REF team, based at Research England (RE), on behalf of the four UK higher education funding bodies. RE is part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), and under this arrangement UKRI has the role of 'data controller' for personal data submitted by the University to the REF.

REF submissions, personal data provided to UKRI are limited to what is required by REF guidance. In some cases this may include identifiers such as a HESA ID. In audit, assurance, verification, or exceptional circumstances, additional personal data may be shared with UKRI where required and will not be pseudonymised. You can find further information about what data are being collected on the REF website, at www.ref.ac.uk

What will be published

The information to be published by UKRI, on behalf of the four UK higher education funding bodies, will include a single list of all the outputs submitted by the University. The list of outputs will include standard bibliographic data (including the author name) for each output, but will not be listed by author name.

Your rights

Under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the GDPR, you have the right to see and receive a copy of any personal information that the University holds about you, as well as other rights. More information can be found from the University's intranet pages: <https://newcastle.sharepoint.com/hub/ig/Pages/GDPR.aspx>

or by contacting:

Data Protection Officer: Maureen Wilkinson, Email: rec-man@ncl.ac.uk

The same rights apply to the information the UKRI holds about you. Further information about the Act and GRPR, and guidance on making a subject access request, can be found at [Make a request for personal information – UKRI](#)

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If you have any concerns about your information being used for these purposes, please contact:

Data Protection Officer
UK Research and Innovation
Polaris House
Swindon, SN2 1FL

Email: dataprotection@ukri.org

This privacy notice should be read in conjunction with the University's Data Protection Policy ([Data Protection Policy | Newcastle University](#)) and colleague privacy notice ([Information for Colleagues | Data Protection | Newcastle University](#))

6.3 Appendix C: UoA Coordinator Role Descriptor

Background

The UoA Coordinator is an academic role which plays a key part in the UoA Team comprising selected colleagues from academic units contributing to the UoA such as the Head(s) of Academic Unit and Director(s) of Research. The UoA Team will work with the Dean of Research and Innovation to propose the composition of the UoA to the University Research and Innovation Committee (URIC, acting as the REF Steering Group). URIC will make final recommendations for the submission by the University.

Workload

UoA Coordinators are expected to be in post from January 2025 until March 2029. Post holders will be expected to commit a proportion of their time each week in order to fulfil the requirements of the role. This commitment will be reflected in workload planning to ensure that all UoA Coordinators have a balanced and reasonable workload.

Role

- To have oversight of and to support the preparation of the UoA submission
- To keep up to date with the latest REF developments and specific UoA panel guidance and to communicate strategy, University policy, guidelines and timescales to the UoA Team.
- To contribute to and manage the review of outputs (with other internal or external reviewers where appropriate) in order to maximise the validity and robustness of the output quality assessments.
- To work with the PGR Director, Research Directors and Administrative team to ensure all data are recorded accurately on University systems and that the CRIS is checked and maintained appropriately.
- To identify and oversee the preparation of impact case studies and to assist with the assessment of their quality.
- To draft the Strategy, People and Research Environment narrative to ensure that:
 - The research landscape is presented in the most advantageous manner.
 - There is a coherent expression of a sustainable research strategy for the future, grounded in current research strengths.
- To ensure the UoA submission is representative.
- To aid in the determination of the volume measure for the UoA.

6.4 Appendix D: Committees

Senate

Senate is the supreme governing body of the University in all academic matters although many of its responsibilities are delegated to sub-committees including University Research and Innovation Committee. The membership of Senate is largely elected or appointed and comprises: 13 *ex officio* members (including four students), 22 academic members elected from the University overall, one lay member of Council, one Professional Services colleague, and up to three co-opted members. Membership is defined by the University Statutes, which also describes the method of appointment.

Ex-officio members:

- Vice-Chancellor and President
- Deputy Vice-Chancellor
- Pro-Vice-Chancellors
- Deans

University Executive Board

University Executive Board's remit is to exercise an integrated overview of the University's policies and resources through the implementation of the strategic plan and operating statement, to ensure a prompt and strongly co-ordinated approach to the evaluation of academic and business opportunities, and to appraise and prioritise proposals for major new initiatives. Membership of University Executive Board comprises the senior management team of the University.

- Vice-Chancellor and President
- Deputy Vice-Chancellor
- Pro-Vice-Chancellors
- Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellors
- Registrar
- Chief Financial Officer
- Executive Director of People Services

University Research and Innovation Committee

The University Research and Innovation Committee is responsible for all matters pertaining to and impacting on research within the University, including preparation for national research assessment exercises in conjunction with Faculty Research Strategy Groups.

Ex officio members:

- The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation) (Chair)
- The Dean of Business & Innovation
- The Dean of Culture & Inclusion
- The Director of Newcastle University Academic Track
- The Faculty Deans of Research & Innovation
- The Faculty Deans of Postgraduate Research
- The Director of Research & Innovation

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- The Director of Business Development & Enterprise / Deputy Director R&I
- The Head of the Newcastle Joint Research Office
- The Heads of Faculty Research
- The Research Strategy Manager
- The Head of Research Funding Development
- The Director of NUIT
- The Director of Academic Services & University Library
- A Senate representative
- The Student Union PG Sabbatical Officer

In attendance:

Representatives as the Chair deems necessary to support the effective conduct of the Committee's business.

6.5 Appendix E: Key decision makers and methods of appointment

Role/Office	Method of Appointment
Vice-Chancellor and President	Governed by University Statute: Statutes of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne Executive and Governance Office Newcastle University
Deputy-Vice-Chancellor	Governed by University Statute.
Pro-Vice-Chancellors	Governed by University Statute.
Registrar	Governed by University Statute.
Chair of University Research and Innovation Committee	Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation (see above).
Deans of Research/Innovation	Internal appointments made on rotating basis after open advertisement. Selection by Faculty Appointment Board.
Executive Director of People Services	Substantive appointment made by Selection Committee after external recruitment campaign.
Director of Research and Innovation	Substantive appointment made by Selection Committee after external recruitment campaign.
Director of Faculty Operations	Substantive appointment made by Selection Committee after external recruitment campaign.
Head of Academic Unit	Internal appointment made on rotating basis after open advertisement. Selection by Faculty Appointment Board
Unit Director of Research	Often also Head of Academic Unit. If not, internal responsibility nominated on rotating basis by Head of Academic Unit.
UoA Co-ordinators	Nominated by Heads of Academic Unit.

6.6 Appendix F: Policy statement on the responsible use of research metrics

Background

Newcastle University recognises that the responsible use of metrics can support the delivery of our Research Strategy's ambition to catalyse transformative research within and between disciplines, and build a positive and thriving research culture. As such, we have produced this Policy Statement and associated guidance on appropriate use of quantitative research metrics as part of responsible research assessment.^[1] The University became a signatory to DORA in 2017 and reaffirmed a commitment to the principles of DORA in the REF code of practice published in 2019. The use of research metrics falls within the context of the University Code of Good Practice in Research.

This policy statement builds on these commitments and a number of other prominent external initiatives, including the Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics and *Metric Tide* report. The latter urged UK institutions to develop a statement of principles on the use of quantitative indicators in research management and assessment, where metrics should be considered in terms of **robustness** (using the best available data); **humility** (recognising that quantitative evaluation can complement, but does not replace, expert assessment); **transparency** (keeping the collection of data and its analysis open to scrutiny); **diversity** (reflecting a multitude of research and researcher career paths); and **reflexivity** (updating our use of metrics to take account of the effects that such measures have had).

Implementation of this statement supports our strategic ambitions, and our institutional commitment to the Concordat for Research Integrity and the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, and is supported (and in some cases, mandated) by research funders in the UK (e.g., UKRI, Wellcome Trust etc.). This statement will evolve as we develop the University's Research Culture Action Plan in consultation with students, colleagues and external partners.

This statement is integral to our commitment to developing all members of the research community across career stages and job families. It will support our aim to cultivate a research culture that recognises diverse contributions to research, and to build a research culture that values inclusive collaboration, integrity, transparency, and global visibility.

Implementation of the Responsible Use of Metrics Statement

We recognize that Newcastle University is a diverse university, and metrics will be used in ways that are sensitive to disciplinary and local contexts. This Policy Statement is deliberately flexible to allow for the diversity of contexts, and is not intended to provide a comprehensive set of rules.

We recognize that metrics are often more appropriate to evaluate the collective contribution of teams, and are less useful in the evaluation of individual contributions which may be diverse. At the University, we endeavour to use metrics to provide a collective picture of how we are performing against our strategy.

To help put this Statement into practice, we will provide an evolving set of guidance material to include more detailed discussion and examples of how these principles could be applied. Newcastle University is committed to valuing research and researchers based on their merits, not the merits of metrics. In the future, we will provide relevant training for all members of our research community through the Newcastle University Skills Academy.

The implementation of this Statement will include establishing a review and monitoring process, enabling regular institutional review of adherence to these principles, as well as mechanisms for reporting and addressing breaches of the principles.

Key progress

- Responsible use of Research Metrics policy statement and guiding principles published.
- Creation of the Responsible use of Research Metrics Special Interest Group with members from Professional Services.
- Creation of an implementation plan and signed off by the University Research Innovation Committee.
- Appointment of Research Integrity Project Officer to provide professional services support in the responsible use of research metrics.
- Appointment of an Associate Dean for Good Research Practice to provide academic leadership in the responsible use of research metrics.

Planned for 2025/26:

- The consideration of the merits and opportunities in becoming a signatory of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).
- Expand membership of the Responsible Use of Research Metrics Special Interest Group to include Academics.
- Embed a short statement and signposting to our responsible use of research metrics commitments in all research staff and student recruitment, induction, appraisal, promotion and REF Internal and External Quality Assessment processes.
- Develop training and guidance on the responsible use of research metrics that can be used by all colleagues.

Guiding Principles for the Responsible Use of Metrics at Newcastle University

This guidance is provided to ensure that research assessment activities are carried out in line with the three principles below.

Metrics should:

Support expert judgement

Research assessment should always be based on expert judgement with metrics used to support and inform this assessment.

Quality, influence, excellence and impact of research are typically abstract and subjective concepts that prohibit direct measurement. There is no simple way to measure research quality, and quantitative approaches can only be interpreted as indirect proxies for quality. Superficial inferences of the quality of research by use of research metrics alone in research evaluations can be misleading.

Irresponsible use of metrics alone can pose the risk of incentivizing undesirable behaviours, such as focusing on number rather than quality of publications, chasing publications in journals with a high Journal Impact Factor (JIF) regardless of whether this is the most appropriate venue for publication, or discouraging the use of open research approaches such as pre-prints or data-sharing.

Be fit for purpose

Data should only be obtained from reliable and accurate sources and due consideration should be given to ensure data quality.

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Metrics that we use should align with what we value as important. For example, categories that we value include: (a) research quality, (b) research volume, income, and activity levels (critical mass), (c) research impact, and (d) research environment.

Disciplinary differences should be accounted for. Researchers from different disciplines have different perspectives of what characterises research quality, and different approaches for determining what constitutes a significant research output (for example, the relative importance of book chapters vs journal articles). As some metrics lend themselves to certain discipline areas to the detriment of others, we will work hard with the wider sector to ensure that research in all our Faculties is understood and its value represented, across STEM and SHAPE disciplines.

All research outputs must be considered on their own merits, in an appropriate context that reflects the needs and diversity of research fields and outcomes. Metrics should be used in the correct context and users should be mindful of changes in information that might affect the underlying assessment.

Quantitative indicators should be selected from those that are widely used and easily understood to ensure that the process is transparent and they are being applied appropriately. Likewise, any quantitative goals or benchmarks must be open to scrutiny.

If goals or benchmarks are expressed quantitatively, care should be taken to avoid the metric itself becoming the target of research activity at the expense of research quality.

Metrics that are useful for aggregate assessment may not be appropriate for use at a different scale, for example in assessment of an individual output. For example, the JIF of a journal is a useful measure of the whole content of the journal, but cannot be extrapolated to infer the quality of every article within the journal.

Be transparent

When metrics are used to form an assessment, the data sources and assumptions should be acknowledged. New and alternative metrics are continuously being developed to inform the reception, usage, and value of all types of research output. Any new or non-standard metric or indicator must be used and interpreted in keeping with the other principles listed here for more traditional metrics. Additionally, the sources and methods behind such metrics should be considered as to whether they are vulnerable to being gamed, manipulated, or fabricated.

Metrics (in particular bibliometrics) are available from a variety of services, with differing levels of coverage, quality and accuracy, and these aspects should be considered when selecting a source for data or metrics. Where necessary, such as in the evaluation of individual researchers, a source that allows records to be verified and curated should be used to ensure records are comprehensive and accurate.