

17 February 2020

BY EMAIL]

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Dear Vice-chancellor or Principal,

Research Excellence Framework 2021: Invitation to make submissions to the REF

1. I am writing to set out the arrangements for making submissions to the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF).

Process for making the submission

2. Each institution's submission to REF 2021 must be made electronically through the online REF submission system. We have now officially launched the submission system, and all REF forms are now available for data entry. The deadline for submissions is noon on 27 November 2020.

3. Your institution's submission must be made by one of the two authorised submitters that you have nominated and provided us with details for. These individuals (one of whom may be you) are authorised to make the submission on your behalf, and to confirm the accuracy of the data it contains. They should also be prepared to confirm that in preparing the submission, the institution has applied its code of practice that has been approved by the funding body.

4. When the final submission has been made it will be held at Research England on behalf of the four UK funding bodies. We will send an email to both of your authorised submitters and to your institutional REF contact to confirm receipt of the submission.

5. If after submitting, but before the 27 November 2020 deadline, you discover errors in your submission, your authorised submitters will be able to 'unsubmit' in order to correct data errors. We will provide full instructions to authorised submitters and institutional REF contacts on how to submit through the submission system.

6. All submitted information must be capable of verification. The arrangements for audit and verification of submissions are available at:

<http://www.ref.ac.uk/publications/audit-guidance-201904/>

7. In making a submission, your authorised submitter will be required to confirm that the funding bodies may use the data for assessment, for subsequent funding calculations and for

publication. Information about arrangements for storing and processing the submitted data, including the confidentiality arrangements for panel members and procedures for excluding confidential or sensitive parts of submissions from publication, is available in the following publications:

- a. We have provided model REF data collection statements for HEIs to use to inform their staff and non-staff stakeholders how their personal data will be used in REF 2021. Note that this document has recently been updated.
<http://www.ref.ac.uk/guidance/data-management-guidance/model-ref-data-collection-statements-for-heis/>
- b. The Confidentiality and information security agreement for REF 2021 panels can be found at Annex E of the Panel criteria and working methods.
<http://www.ref.ac.uk/publications/panel-criteria-and-working-methods-201902/>
- c. Procedures for excluding confidential or sensitive parts of submissions from publication are described in paragraphs 261-264, 307 and 308 of the Guidance on submissions.
<http://www.ref.ac.uk/publications/guidance-on-submissions-201901/>

8. Information about the publication of results and submissions is available at paragraphs 34-43 of the Guidance on submissions. <http://www.ref.ac.uk/publications/guidance-on-submissions-201901/>. Please note that those published parts of submissions that contain factual data and textual information about research activity will be licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence (CC-BY 4.0).

Amending details of authorised submitters

9. To amend the details of your institution's authorised submitters, you will need to resubmit the authorised submitter form. Forms should be emailed to info@ref.ac.uk. If you need to amend authorised submitter details ahead of the 6 March 2020 deadline for making staff circumstances reductions requests, please provide the form by 24 February 2020. If you need to amend authorised submitter details before the final submission deadline on 27 November 2020, please provide the form by 20 November 2020.

10. Please note, this form is not available to download. It was sent to Heads of Institutions via email on 30 July 2019. Please also note, the email address provided for authorised submitters must match the email address that the individual uses to log in to the REF submission system.

Arrangements for providing final copies of codes of practice and equality impact assessments, and the staff circumstances report

11. The funding bodies have approved all institutions' codes of practice on the identification of staff with significant responsibility for research, determining who is an independent researcher, and the selection of outputs. The codes of practice are due to be published on the REF website

shortly. We will require institutions to provide us with the final version of their code, suitable for publication, after submissions have been made in early 2021.

12. Also in early 2021, institutions will also be required to provide us with the final version of their equality impact assessment (EIA) on their policy and procedures for submitting to REF 2021, and a report reflecting on their experience of supporting staff with circumstances during the REF submission process.

13. Further details about the arrangements for providing these documents are set out at Annex A. This includes a template for the staff circumstances report.

Staff circumstances

14. For REF 2021, institutions are able to submit staff circumstances reduction requests for consideration in advance of the submission deadline. These are requests for reductions (without penalty) to the number of outputs required for a given submitted unit. The advance process will provide HEIs with the opportunity to receive decisions prior to making submissions in REF 2021.

15. Requests should be made by noon on 6 March 2020 through the REF 2021 submission system. Decisions on these requests will be provided to institutions by 29 May 2020.

16. In applying the reductions that have received advance recommendation for approval from EDAP at the submission deadline, institutions must ensure that these reductions still accurately reflect the circumstances pertaining to submitted staff. Where there are changes to the staff included in requests or the nature of their circumstances since the request was made, institutions must update the information in the REF 6a/b forms before making their submissions in November 2020.

17. If you have any queries about any of the information contained in this letter please contact info@ref.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Kim Hackett
REF Director

Annex A: Arrangements for providing final copies of codes of practice and equality impact assessments, and the staff circumstances report

1. This document sets out the arrangements for providing:
 - a. final copies of your institution's code of practice for the REF
 - b. the institution's final equality impact assessment
 - c. a completed staff circumstances report.

Codes of practice

2. In early 2020 we will publish the approved codes of practice (COPs) of all institutions intending to participate in REF 2021. To ensure that we publish up-to-date COPs after the conclusion of the REF, we will require the final version by Wednesday 31 March 2021.

Equality impact assessments

3. Alongside the final COP, we request a copy of your institution's final equality impact assessment (EIA) by Wednesday 31 March 2021.

4. As set out in 'Guidance on codes of practice' (REF 2019/03), the funding bodies require all institutions to conduct an EIA on their policy and procedures for identifying staff with significant responsibility for research (where applicable), determining research independence and for selecting outputs for the REF. This document also sets out the funding bodies' expectation that all institutions will publish their final EIAs after the submissions have been made, as a matter of good practice.

5. The EIAs we collect will be used by the funding bodies and the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel (EDAP) to assist with evaluating the overall effectiveness of the equality and diversity aspects of the REF at sector level, and lessons learned for the future. EDAP will not record judgements or comment on individual institutions' EIAs.

6. Informed by EDAP's review of EIAs in REF 2014, the Chair of EDAP has identified some key points for HEIs on what to include in EIAs:

- a. Introduction. Setting out the purpose of the EIA, and who (role / committee) is responsible for the EIA.
- b. Background. Setting out the wider context, including measures taken to embed E&D in REF processes.
- c. Scope. Being clear on:
 - i. What is covered by the EIA (policies / practices), what's being reviewed and why, and which protected characteristics have been considered.
 - ii. Who's potentially affected by the above policies / practices.
 - iii. The stages involved / interim EIAs undertaken.

- d. Analyses. Providing a summary of any findings of interim EIAs, as well as findings of the final EIA. This may include any statistical analyses conducted where the data are of sufficient size to allow this.
- e. Conclusions. Setting out observations and lessons learned.
- f. Action plan. Setting out short and longer-term intended actions taken or planned to prevent discrimination or advance equality.

Staff circumstances report

7. As set out in the Guidance on codes of practice (REF 2019/03), HEIs will also be required to submit a report reflecting on their experience of supporting staff with circumstances during the REF submission process. We will require a completed report for your institution to be provided by Wednesday 31 March 2021. A template for the report is provided at the end of this document.

8. The reports will be collected primarily for analysis purposes, to assist with evaluating the overall effectiveness of the equality and diversity aspects of the REF at sector level, and lessons learned for the future.

Collection procedures

9. Institutions should provide the final COP, EIA and staff circumstances report by email to info@ref.ac.uk, no later than Wednesday 31 March 2021. The documents should be provided in one email as separate attachments. The COP and EIA should be provided in PDF, and the staff circumstances report in Word format.

10. If you have any queries about any of the information contained in this document please contact info@ref.ac.uk.

Staff circumstances report template

1. This template is provided for institutions' staff circumstances reports. It is annotated with guidance about the information required in each of its sections.
2. To minimise the risk of identifying individuals, **do not record data** where the number for any category is less than five.

Part 1: Total number of staff declaring circumstances

In Table 1, record the following:

- The total number of staff at your institution who have voluntarily declared circumstances (whether or not these were submitted in a reduction request). Each staff member should only be counted once in this row regardless of the number of circumstances they have.
- The total number of circumstances declared (whether or not these were submitted in a reduction request). This may be higher than the number of staff declaring circumstances where some staff declare multiple circumstances.
- The total number of declarations received that requested the removal of the minimum of one output.

Table 1: total declarations

	Total number across institution
Number of staff declaring circumstances	
Number of circumstances declared	
Number of minimum of one declarations	

Part 2: Declarations by circumstance type

In Table 2a, record the following:

- The number of staff declaring defined circumstances in your institution. Some staff may have declared multiple circumstances, for example, if a staff member declared that they are an ECR and that they had a period of maternity leave. In this instance, the staff member would be counted once.
- The number of staff declaring circumstances requiring a judgement in your institution.

Table 2a: declarations by overall circumstance type

Circumstance type	Number of staff declaring circumstance
Defined circumstances	
Circumstances requiring a judgement	

In Table 2b, where the data are sufficient to report a breakdown by defined circumstance type without providing potentially identifying information, please record:

- The number of each defined circumstance type declared by staff in your institution. e.g. if a staff member declared that they are an ECR and that they had a period of maternity leave, record one instance of each circumstance in the relevant row.

Table 2b: declarations by type of defined circumstance

Circumstance type	Number declared
Early career researchers	
Secondments or career breaks	
Family-related leave	
Junior clinical academics (UOAs 1-6 only)	

Part 3: Reflections

Reflections on the following:

- Your HEI's approach to determining whether to request a reduction in outputs required for submitting units
- Your HEI's approach to adjusting expectations of staff who have declared circumstances
- Differences between circumstances declared and circumstances submitted (e.g. whether any protected characteristic group was more or less likely to declare circumstances and whether their circumstances were more or less likely to be submitted)
- Your HEI's views on the staff circumstances process for REF 2021 and how this was managed in your institution

(Maximum 750 words)