REF2029
Research Excellence Framework

Ulster University

REF2029 Code of Practice

Version 8.2

REF 2029
Research Excellence Framework

Code of Practice Template

Institution name: **Ulster University**

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Research Excellence Framework

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Part 1: Introduction

The University's Research Strategy 2023-2028 defines the ambitions for our research activities and outcomes and clearly indicates that people are at the centre of research and innovation and that the culture and community in which our researchers thrive is core to Ulster University.

We believe our research culture and environment support the continuous development and improvement of our research community and create the conditions needed to let people flourish and ensure that all members of staff are recognised as playing a central role in achieving our collective ambitions.

Our REF2029 Code of Practice (CoP) covers:

- the fair and transparent identification of staff with significant responsibility for research (SRR);
- determining the conditions that define an independent researcher; and
- the fair and transparent selection of outputs for inclusion.

1.1 Background

It is recognised that this CoP is a requirement for REF2029 and sets a minimum standard for participation. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) wishing to make a submission to the exercise must have a CoP approved by the funding bodies.

1.2 Development of the CoP

To ensure that the underpinning REF Principles of robustness, transparency and equity and inclusion, are reflected in our CoP, the processes therein have been developed through engagement with our research community and staff representative bodies.

Our REF2029 Steering Group, chaired by the PVC Research (PVCR), is responsible for the development, oversight and implementation of the CoP. The REF2029 Steering Group reports to Research And Innovation Committee (RIC), which is responsible for approving the CoP and recommending it to the University Senate for approval.

This CoP is written in accordance with the REF2029 Guidance published in modular instalments and any future updates required will be made in consultation with the appropriate staff representative groups.

1.3 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI

EDI is at the core of our DNA at Ulster University, and our Equality Scheme and People, Place and Partnership - Delivering Sustainable Futures For All Strategy aim to place EDI at the heart of everything we do as a university. EDI has underpinned all our REF and RAE submissions over the years.

We are a value-led and people-centric University, and this has informed us about the development of our REF2029 CoP. In designing the processes within this document, we have been mindful of the needs of all staff, and particularly those needs related to protected characteristics. We have aimed to ensure that all our processes meet the highest EDI standards.

While we maintain our commitment to meeting all statutory requirements in relation to equality of opportunity and good relations, our People, Place and Partnership - Delivering Sustainable Futures For All Strategy seeks to go further than compliance and represents the need to place diversity and inclusion at the heart of the research culture at Ulster University. In doing so we will deliver an experience and environment in which diverse individuals and research contributions are valued and supported. We strive to support the career aspirations of all staff which help maximise inclusion and participation in REF2029.

We aim to embed and mainstream EDI considerations into our CoP and, in developing it, we have had due regard to all relevant equality and anti-discrimination legislation.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the University, in carrying out all its functions, powers and duties relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- persons of different religious belief, gender, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;

- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependents and persons without.

In addition, without prejudice to the obligations above, in carrying out its functions in relation to Northern Ireland the University is required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

The University sets out how it proposes to fulfil the duties imposed by Section 75 in its Equality Scheme and Equality Scheme Action Plan.

Under the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006, the University is required to have due regard to the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage participation by disabled people in public (university) life (these are known as the 'Disability Duties'). It is also required to prepare a plan to demonstrate how it proposes to do this.

Our commitment to the principles of the Athena Swan Charter is recognised through the achievement of a distinguished Athena Swan Silver institutional award which recognises and celebrates good employment practice for supporting the development and inclusion of women working in higher education and all aspects of university life.
Additionally, one of our largest Schools, the School of Nursing and Paramedic Science has achieved a Gold Athena Swan Award.

As part of Ulster University's Athena Swan Action Plan (2023 – 2028), a Returning Carers' Scheme (RCS) was established to assist the career and professional development of individuals affected by periods of leave for caring responsibilities. We have also established a number of staff networks: LGBT+ , DisAbility, Women's, BAME+, NeuroNetwork and Carers' Network, which are vehicles to promote and enhance equality and inclusion across the University.

The University continues to fund staff to participate in the Aurora Leadership Development Programme which is specifically designed to encourage women to

think of themselves as future leaders and actively engage in developing their leadership potential.
The University was awarded the Race Equality Charter Bronze Award by Advance HE in February 2026. The award recognizes the University's commitment to tackling racial inequalities and building a more inclusive environment for staff and students further demonstrating our commitment to EDI.

The University currently holds and is applying to renew its 'Disability Positive AAA*' accreditation with Employers for Disability Northern Ireland. This accreditation recognizes the work the University has undertaken in implementing a wide array of practical measures to attract and retain employees and service users with disabilities.

The University secured membership of the Age-Friendly University Global Network (AFUGN) in the Summer of 2025. Membership recognises the University's commitment to promoting positive and healthy ageing, and to enhancing the lives of older members of the community through innovative educational programs, research agendas, curriculum development, online education, health and wellness activities, arts and culture programs and civic engagement opportunities. An Age Friendly Action Plan 2026-2030 has been developed to support this initiative; this builds on an organisational shift towards a life stage approach, recognising that people's needs, capacity, and aspirations change across their lives rather than in a linear or age-based way.

1.3.1 Contract Research Staff (CRS)

The University is committed to enhancing the career development of our CRS in line with our Vitae HR Excellence in Research Award. The University values the significant contribution made by our CRS and we wish to do all that we can to improve their career progression and line managers are encouraged to meet regularly with CRS to discuss their career planning and developmental needs and to encourage them to become independent researchers.

As part of our commitment to the Research Concordat for Contract Research Staff, the University has proactively sought to improve the terms and conditions of CRS who have access to the same range of research support as permanent members of

academic staff. The University has put in place a range of programmes to support researchers on the journey towards research independence. A Researcher Network was launched by the PVCR in February 2025. The Researcher Network is a researcher-led community, with champions on each campus, contributing to the goals of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

1.3.2 Part-time staff

A member of part-time staff is treated on the same basis as a comparable full-time member of staff. The expectation for that member of staff to produce eligible research outputs is entirely commensurate with their part-time status.

1.3.3 Fixed-term staff

The University does not treat a member of fixed-term staff less favourably than a comparable permanent member of staff. All fixed-term members of staff have the same access as permanent staff to information on REF and to research support services, training and resources. The University has developed a Pathway to Permanency Policy whereby staff who have 6 years or more service (on two or more fixed-term contracts) are considered for permanency. The University has provided a Bridging Fund to support salary costs for staff between externally funded projects as they progress along the Pathway to Permanency.

1.4 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in RAE and REF

EDI has been at the core of our RAE and REF submissions to date. In addition to Equality Impact Assessments (EIA), known in the Northern Ireland legislation as ‘equality screening’, we also conducted a final EIA on the outcomes from REF2021. It should be noted that the requirements of an EIA within the Northern Ireland legislation far exceed the requirements of an EIA within the GB legislation. Equality screening (EIA) within Northern Ireland legislation includes a requirement for widespread consultation with a broad range of stakeholders and places a range of equality related duties on all public sector employers (Universities are designated as public authorities for the purposes of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

We have been mindful of the outcome from the 2021 EIA in developing this CoP with measures taken that include:

- EDI continuing to be valued, actively promoted and embedded in all research processes and policies;
- progression of the Athena SWAN agenda to encourage and support the involvement and promotion of women in research;
- monitoring the equality profile throughout the REF process;
- monitoring and encouraging the gender balance of staff taking Sabbatical Leave;
- annual Preparing for Promotions workshops, focusing on both the research and academic promotions process within the University;
- promoting gender equality of PhD researchers within individual Schools and Departments reviewing PhD gender balance as part of their Athena SWAN engagement and devising actions to address where relevant;
- the provision of a supportive and collegial space for women via our Women's Network to focus primarily on specific issues of interest to them, to encourage them in their careers and well-being and to enable them to be their best selves;
- the establishment of a number of staff networks to promote and enhance equality and inclusion across the University: LGBT+; DisAbility; BAME+; NeuroNetwork and Returning Carers' Scheme); and
- developing research potential by putting in place appropriate support for staff members starting their research career or resuming research activities on return from long periods away (for example: the Returning Carers' Scheme).

1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in REF2029

Ulster University wishes to ensure that equality of opportunity and good relations are at the core of everything we do throughout the REF2029 cycle and, as such, the processes detailed in this CoP have been designed to ensure inclusion and to maximise participation by ensuring that ALL eligible members of staff are given the opportunity to contribute to REF2029.

Where key decisions must be made, we aim to ensure that they are fair and capable of objective non-discriminatory justification. All decision-makers receive appropriate EDI training.

Where a member of staff wishes to appeal a key decision, we ensure that the appeal process is transparent and independent of the original decision and that the appeal panel includes women and men who have received appropriate training.

1.5.1 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Training

All key decision-makers in the REF process receive appropriate EDI training.

1.5.2 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

We conduct EIAs not because we are required to do but because we want to ensure equality of opportunity and good relations. We believe that EIAs will make our processes better and ensure that we protect the needs and rights of our diverse community of researchers. As issues emerge from the EIAs we are committed to act on the findings and, where necessary, adapt or change our processes to ensure equality of opportunity and good relations. As we progress through the REF2029 cycle we will conduct EIAs at key check points (see Appendix 1 for details of our first EIA which is ongoing). We view an EIA as an iterative process rather than a one-off event and we will use any learning points from the EIAs to make our processes better.

The University has established a REF2029 Equality Working Group (REF2029 EWG) to monitor the implementation of the CoP through regular EIAs and to determine the extent of any impact upon the Section 75 categories.

The REF2029 EWG will draw up a timetable of EIAs on:

- the identification of staff with SRR;
- the identification of staff with research independence (RI); and
- the selection of outputs for inclusion.

The findings and recommendations from the ongoing EIAs will be used to develop the research profile of any group or groups shown to be underrepresented in the REF2029 submission.

A final EIA will be conducted on the final submission and the REF2029 EWG will agree with the format and parameters of this.

1.6 Principles of the CoP

Ulster University is a values-led university. We aim to build a culture in which all flourish, and where values-led behaviour is encouraged and modelled by leaders and colleagues alike.
Our values-led approach has informed the development of our REF2029 CoP, and the following principles underpin its content:

- Integrity - we are open, honest and transparent with each other.
- Collaboration - people and relationships are central to everything we do.
- Enhancing Potential - we strive to be the best that we can be.
- Inclusion - we promote a place to work and study where everyone is accepted.

1.6.1 Integrity

All processes for identifying staff with SRR, determining research independence, and selecting outputs for inclusion have been developed as the result of consultation.

As part of this process all decisions regarding staff eligibility or SRR status are documented. This provides transparency on the evolution of the final submission. Furthermore, each member of staff signs off any changes to their SRR status.

The CoP defines clearly the roles and responsibilities of those staff and groups involved in identifying SRR staff, determining research independence and selecting outputs for REF2029. Details of the roles and responsibilities of the decision makers are detailed in Appendix 2 and the Terms of Reference and Membership of all REF2029 related committees and groups are detailed in Appendix 3.

1.6.2 Collaboration

People and relationships are central to everything we do. We work together to continually build trust between individuals and teams, and we commit to actively listening and communicating with each other. We actively create a transparent

environment that promotes connectedness and partnerships internally and externally.

1.6.3 Enhancing Potential

We nurture our collective strengths and ambitions, empowering each person to become their best self through a wide range of support mechanisms. We recognise and reward excellence and we support all staff to achieve this excellence.

1.6.4 Inclusion

We promote a place to work and study where everyone is accepted. We strive to support the career aspirations of all staff, and we wish to ensure barrier-free processes which help maximise inclusion and participation. In designing the processes within our CoP, we have been mindful of the needs of all staff, and particularly those needs related to protected characteristics. We aim to ensure that all of our processes are equally proofed to prevent unjustifiable and discriminatory barriers.

Commitment is given to support staff who do not have SRR at any stage in the exercise through a variety of measures and resources including training, sabbaticals, mentoring and peer-review. Details of these support processes and resources are available to all staff via our Research Support webpages which detail all the support and resources available for researchers.

1.7 Ulster University's REF2029 Communication Process

All REF2029 related updates and communications are disseminated via staff emails, the staff intranet, INSIGHT (the University's online news channel) and, in the case of staff who are absent from the University, line managers are asked to draw these communications to their attention. As part of the communication process the University has developed a REF2029 Timeline detailing key dates in the national REF2029 timetable and key internal deadlines. The timeline is available online to all staff and is kept under constant review. Any additional updates to the timetable are communicated to all staff via staff emails, the staff intranet and additionally, at local level, updates are provided through appropriate Faculty, School and Unit of Assessment (UoA) meetings or briefings.

Final decisions on any individual's REF2029 status are recorded in our People XD system and clearly communicated and signed off by the individual and their line manager.

The final selection of outputs, and the basis on which this is made, will be clearly communicated to all staff in the relevant UoA by the relevant Research Director (RD).

1.7.1 Communication of the CoP

There will be a programme of activity to ensure the effective dissemination of the CoP. It will be made available centrally to all staff via INSIGHT, the University's internal REF2029 webpages and emails to all staff and locally via research fora such as Faculty, School and Research meetings and Away Days. In the case of staff who are absent from the University line managers will be asked to ensure that they are aware of the availability of the CoP.

Furthermore, if a member of staff requires the CoP in an alternative format staff will be directed to the Research Performance team.

Additionally, once approved by the funding bodies, the CoP will be made available on the University's external website.

1.7.2 Governance of the CoP

Ulster University is committed to having sound governance of the REF2029 CoP and a robust complaints and appeals procedures.

Sections 2.9 to 2.9.1 detail the appeal process in relation to the identification of staff with SRR and Section 2.9.2 details our appeal process in relation to determining independence.

A procedure for complaints in relation to non-adherence with the CoP generally has also been put in place. All such complaints should be sent to the PVC Academic Quality and Student Experience (PVC AQSE). The PVC AQSE is not involved in either the development or implementation of the CoP and is therefore deemed to be independent of the process.

The PVC AQSE will establish a panel to hear the complaint, and the Complaints Panel will include two senior members of staff who have no role in the REF process and will have due regard to gender balance.

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

2.1 SRR

SRR status for all individuals is entered in People XD which feeds into the HESA return and allows for the calculation of the full-time equivalent (fte) of those staff who contribute to the volume measure.

2.2 Guiding Principles of the Process for the Identification of Staff with SRR

The guiding principles of the University's REF2029 process for the identification of staff with SRR (see Appendix 4 for REF definition of SRR) are that:

- no one individual can decide on whether a person is SRR or non-SRR;
- the Research Director (RD) and Head of School (HoS) will ensure clear communication with each individual in relation to their SRR status and any changes in status will always be documented and signed off by the individual and line manager before being communicated to the Research Performance team who is responsible for updating People XD.

2.3 Process for Identifying Staff with or without SRR in REF2029

The University's process for identifying staff with or without SRR was developed for the REF2021 exercise and resulted from an iterative university-wide consultation. For REF2029, the REF2021 process for identifying staff with or without SRR was updated following consultation with ADRIs and RDs who represent the research community (See Figure 1).

SRR status granted for REF2021 is not permanent and is kept under annual review. During the course of their career, staff can move from SRR to Non-SRR status. In cases where a change of status is required a trilateral meeting is held between the individual, the RD and HoS to discuss the reasons for the change in status and the relevant pro-forma is signed by the relevant individual and co-signed by their HoS or RD or line manager before being submitted to the Research Performance team.

The University uses an internal description (SRR pending) for those staff who are transitioning between Non-SRR and SRR status. For staff identified as SRR Pending the RD and HoS agree a set of clear, identifiable, measurable and manageable research expectations with the individual and discuss the support available to them to achieve these expectations. They are also directed to the University's Research Support webpages which outline the research support available to all researchers to assist them in their research journey. Research Only staff (ACEMPFUN 2) are advised of the requirement to provide evidence of Research Independence in order to have SRR status and asked to complete a pro-forma demonstrating their independence as a researcher (See also Section 3 below).

SRR status for all individuals is entered in People XD which feeds into the HESA return and allows for the calculation of the full-time equivalent (fte) of those staff who contribute to the volume measure.

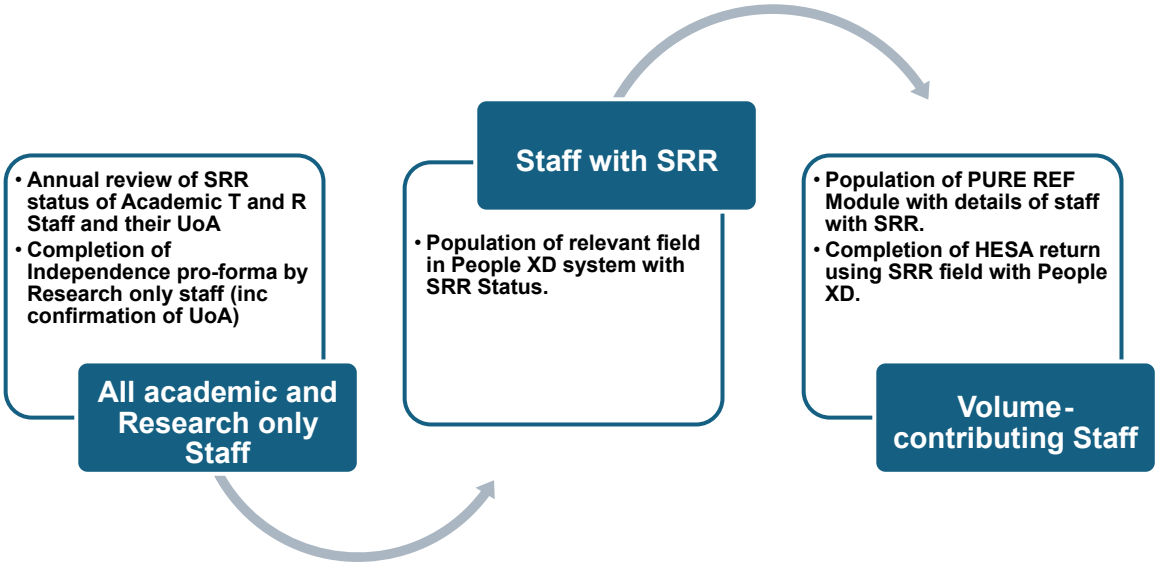


Figure 1: Process of Identifying Staff with SRR

Staff and Committees

This section of the CoP (and associated appendices) gives an overview of Ulster University's structures for research and sets out the operating criteria and terms of reference for individuals, committees, advisory groups and any other bodies involved in the REF2029 advisory or decision-making processes.

The ToR of all Ulster University Committees involved in the development and approval process contain the following equality statement:

> *"In reaching decisions the Committee will have due regard to their impact on, and implications for, the University's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and good relations as outlined in its Equality Scheme, and associated policies and, where possible and practicable, the Committee will ensure that its actions are proactive in this respect."*

2.4 The Operational and Strategic Management of REF2029

The operational management and co-ordination of the REF2029 submission occurs through the Research Performance Team reporting to the PVCR and Director of Research And Innovation (see Figure 2).

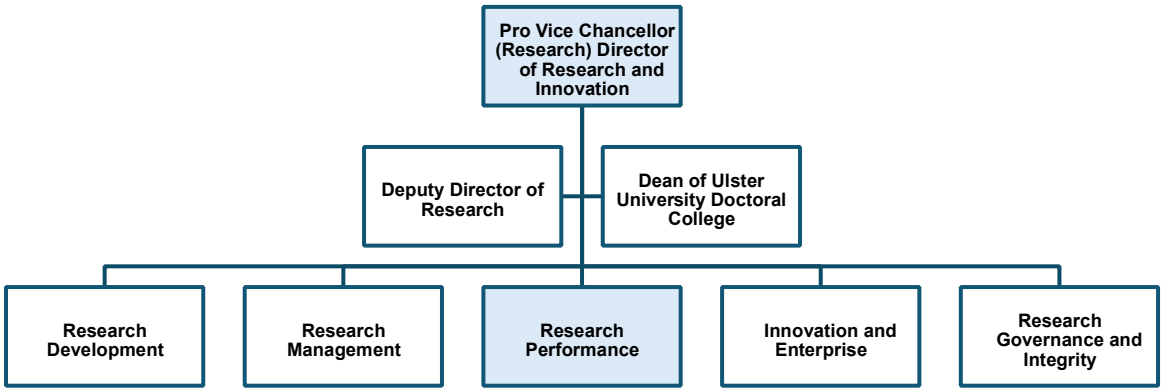


Figure 2: Operational Management of REF2029 submission

In addition, significant operational and strategic management of research activities relating to REF2029 occurs through Research Directors (RD) reporting on research KPIs to Associate Deans for Research and Innovation (ADRI) who report in turn to the PVCR and their respective Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean (PVC and ED).

Research is managed and led within four Faculties by an ADRI with each REF2029 UoA led by a RD who works closely with their respective HoS (see Figure 3).

2.5 The Faculty Structure

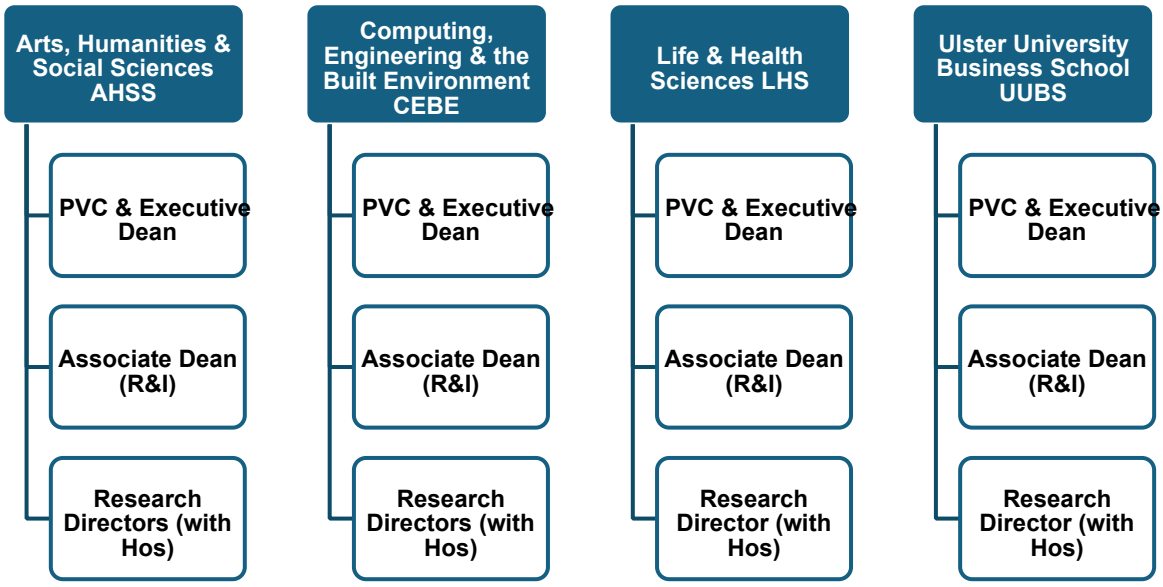


Figure 3: Faculty structure in support of REF2029

2.6 Staff

See Appendix 2 for details of the roles and responsibilities of the REF2029 decision makers.

2.7 Committees

See Appendix 3 for details of the Terms of Reference and Membership of all REF related committees and groups.

2.8 Training for Staff in Decision-Making Roles

See also Section 1.5.1 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Training.

In addition to EDI training, regular forum meetings chaired by the PVCR are held with ADRIs and RDs with a focus on various aspects of the REF Guidance, for example:

- Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU); Engagement and Impact (E and I); and
- Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE), etcetera.

The forum meetings are also used to deliver REF training and to share best practice in relation to REF activities.

2.9 Reasons for Appeal

Appeals can only be made where there is non-agreement of an individual's SRR status.

2.9.1 Academic Staff

All academic staff who have a mutually agreed SRR status are expected to have completed a pro-forma agreeing to this designation (see Appendix 5). Where a member of staff does not agree on SRR status at the trilateral meeting with their RD and HoS, a further meeting will be arranged to discuss this; if there is still no consensus on SRR status a meeting will take place with the relevant ADRI and, if required, PVC and ED. If there is still no agreement following the meetings the member of staff's default status will be non-SRR and, at that stage, the member of staff may instigate the formal appeals process (see Section 2.9).

2.9.2 Research Only Staff

All Research Only staff are required to meet the independence criteria in order to be SRR and are expected to complete a pro-forma outlining evidence of their independence (see Appendix 6). Where there is a dispute over independence a meeting will be arranged with the RD or line manager and if there is still no agreement an additional meeting will be arranged with the relevant ADRI and, if required, the PVC and ED. If there is still no agreement following the meetings, the

member of staff's default status will be Ineligible and, at that stage, the member of staff may instigate the formal appeals process (see Section 2.10).

2.10 Appeals Process

The appeals process is intended to be the means by which:

- Academic staff can seek a review of the University's decision to default their status to non-SRR as a result of non-agreement on their status; and
- Research Only staff can seek a review of the University's decision to default their status to Ineligible as a result of non-agreement of their independent status.

The appeals mechanism will operate as a fair, transparent, and independent safeguard and, as a result, staff will have confidence that raising an appeal will not result in any form of detriment, disadvantage, or adverse treatment. Appeals should be made in writing to the PVC Academic Quality and Student Experience (AQSE) detailing the grounds on which they wish to make the appeal. The PVC AQSE will convene an Appeals Panel comprising representation from People and Culture (P and C), Research and Innovation (R and I) and a RD from a Faculty other than that of the appellant. In setting up the panel due regard will be paid to gender balance. Members of the Appeals Panel will be independent of the REF2029 decision-making processes and will be trained in equality legislation.

All appeals should normally be lodged within two weeks of the default designation. The Appeals Panel will be convened, and the individual will be informed of the decision of the Appeals Panel by letter no later than two weeks from the date of the lodgement of the Appeal. A meeting will also be offered should the individual wish to discuss the matter further with a Panel Member.

2.11 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) on Identification of Staff with SRR

This section should be read in conjunction with Section 1.5.2 which details our overall approach and ethos in relation to EIAs.

The EIA on academic staff identified as having SRR status for the 2024-25 HESA return is informed by an analysis of data in respect of all the protected characteristics of staff considered to meet the criteria for having SRR using the following data:

- the total cohort of Academic Staff
- the total cohort of Eligible Academic Staff (that is, all Teaching and Research)
- the current cohort of Academic Staff with SSR as per the 2024-25 HESA return

The purpose of the EIA on the identification of Academic Staff with SRR and their allocated REF2029 UoA is to ensure that there is no differential impact on groups with protected characteristics (See Appendix 1).

Our EIA shows that all categories are expected to benefit in that our CoP sets out to afford equality of opportunity for all research-active staff, regardless of their protected characteristics.

Further EIAs on the identification of Academic Staff with SRR and their allocated UoAs will be carried out at the following key points:

- Autumn 2026, using the 25-26 HESA staff return and REF2029 UoA Descriptors
- Autumn 2027, using the 26-27 HESA staff return and REF2029 UoA Descriptors
- Autumn 2028, with submission.

The University is committed to addressing any issues that emerge from the EIAs and, where necessary, adapting or changing our processes to ensure equality of opportunity and good relations. We view EIAs as an iterative learning process rather than a ‘one-off’ event.

The new decoupling rules for REF2029 limit opportunities for exclusion of any particular groups. The REF2029 rules do not require a minimum of one output attributed to each member of SRR staff which reduces any pressure that may disproportionately affect staff with protected characteristics.

Part 3: Determining Research Independence

3.1 Process for Determining Research Independence

All Research Only (ACEMPFUN 2) staff are made aware of the REF2029 definition of research independence and the requirement for Research Only (RO) staff to be

independent researchers in order to be SRR. This requirement is communicated either via an individual research trilateral meeting with their RD and HoS (see Figure 1) or via a research group meeting. To ensure transparency and consistency, all RO staff will be provided with a briefing document on both REF2029 and the definition of independence (see Appendix 6). To ensure that all RO staff are fully briefed, the Research Performance team provides RDs and HoS with a list of all RO staff (excluding Research Assistants) irrespective of their contract end date. The Research Performance team also monitors all new starts and provides RDs and HoS with details of all new starts on a monthly basis. As part of their local induction all RO new starts will be provided with the REF2029 briefing document.

The onus will be on each member of RO staff to demonstrate, and provide evidence of, their independence to their RD or HoS and complete a pro-forma (see Appendix 6) confirming which of the independence criteria they meet. If a RO member of staff is deemed to be independent, then they are automatically designated as SRR as their combined independence and RO academic function demonstrate significant research activity. As per Section 2.4 their SRR status is recorded in People XD. If a member of RO staff does not provide evidence of independence, they are automatically ineligible.

Staff on Research Only (RO) contracts are assessed against the REF2029 criteria using data held in the University's Worktribe system on external grant applications and in Pure on external awards, research outputs and PhD supervision.

The process for determining whether staff on RO contracts have research independence is an open process with deadlines for return of pro-formae in June 2026 and June 2027 in advance of each HESA return for the volume-contributing years. Upon receipt of the pro-forma Research Directors (RDs), together with the Research Performance team verifies the evidence of independence. The respective ADRI and RD will then decide if the independence criteria have been met and the member of staff is informed within two weeks of submitting the form. The member of staff has the right to appeal the decision (see Section 2.9.2 above regarding the Appeal process and Section 3.3 below).

The University's process for identifying RO staff with Research Independence (RI) was developed for the REF2021 exercise and resulted from an iterative university wide consultation. For REF2029, we again consulted with the research community and UCU and the process was approved through the relevant committee structures (see also Appendix I).

3.2 Staff, Committees and Training

Please see Part 2, Sections 2.5 to 2.8 for details of Staff, Committees and Training.

3.3 Appeals

The appeal process and the appeal panel on issues of research independence will be identical to that for SRR (see Section 2.9 above).

3.4 EIA on the Identification of Independent Researchers

This section should be read in conjunction with Section 1.5.2 which details our overall approach and ethos in relation to EIAs. The small numbers of Research Only staff with SRR and the need to protect anonymity make it difficult to undertake a full analysis. The small numbers also make it difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions.
UU has 199 Research Only (RO) staff in total and 178 if Research Assistants are excluded. Currently the University has 21 RO staff (11.6%) who have been determined to have Research Independence (RI).

There may be an increase in the 11.6% over the next year or so as independence can occur at any time over the duration of a person's career and the RI process is open all year round which allows RO staff to apply at any stage.

Eighty-six percent of those consulted on the Process for the Identification of Independent Researchers felt the process was fair and transparent.

Part 4: Allocating Contracts to UoAs

4.1 Policies and Procedures

The allocation of eligible staff contracts to Units of Assessment (UoAs) is based on the primary disciplinary focus of the individual's research activity, using the REF UoA descriptors as the principal reference point.

In the case of Interdisciplinary research decision-makers review the final published UoA descriptors and determine which REF UoA is best placed to assess the quality of the research. Appropriate disciplinary expertise is sought in such cases to ensure fairness and transparency.

Allocation to UoAs is agreed at the SSR meetings for academic staff and signed off by the member of staff, RD and HoS. When submitting the pro-forma for RI, RO staff complete the UoA field and, when they are confirmed to have RI, the UoA is confirmed by their RD. It should be noted that all allocations are currently based on the REF2021 descriptors and will be reviewed once the final REF2029 descriptors are published although it is not expected that the final descriptors will vary greatly from REF2021.

4.2 Staff, Committees and Training

Please see Part 2, Sections 2.5 to 2.8 for details of Staff, Committees and Training.

4.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

This section should be read in conjunction with Section 1.5.2 which details our overall approach and ethos in relation to EIAs.

In terms of allocating contracts to REF2029 UoAs, this formed part of the 2024-25 HESA return whereby all REF-Eligible staff (that is, those on T and R and Research Only contracts) must be allocated to a UoA irrespective of whether they are designated as SRR or as having RI.

Currently all allocations to UoAs are made as part of the SRR and RI processes and allocations are mutually agreed on the basis of the fit of the member of staff's research with the REF2021 UoA Descriptors. This fit may be reviewed once the

REF2029 UoA descriptors are published in Autumn 2026 although it is not anticipated that there will be major changes to the descriptors.

It should be recognised that an individual's UoA may change between the annual HESA returns, reflecting the evolving nature of their research and their substantive connection to a UoA.

Our EIA on the process for determining SRR also covered the allocation of contracts to REF UoAs and shows that all categories are expected to benefit in that our CoP sets out to afford equality of opportunity for all research-active staff regardless of their protected characteristics (See Appendix 1).

Further equality screening on the identification of Academic Staff with SRR and their allocated UoAs will be carried out at the following key points:

- Autumn 2026, using the 25-26 HESA staff return and the final REF2029 UoA Descriptors
- Autumn 2027, using the 26-27 HESA staff return and the final REF2029 UoA Descriptors
- Autumn 2028, with submission.

The University is committed to addressing any issues that emerge from the equality screening and, where necessary, adapting or changing our processes to ensure equality of opportunity and good relations. We view equality screening as an iterative learning process rather than a 'one-off' event.

The new decoupling rules for REF2029 limit opportunities for exclusion of any particular groups. The REF2029 rules do not require a minimum of one output attributed to each member of SRR staff which reduces any pressure that may disproportionately affect staff with protected characteristics.

Part 5: Selecting Outputs

5.1 Selection of Outputs for REF2029

The following paragraphs detail the University's process for identifying eligible research outputs and for ensuring a fair and transparent approach to the final selection of outputs for inclusion in the REF2029 submission.

The overriding principle in the selection of outputs is to achieve the optimal submission and maximise the REF return for the University in support of the vitality of its research community. The process for output selection will be clearly communicated to all staff within the UoA reinforcing that the submission is a collective effort such that the submission optimises the UoA and University's REF2029 return and thereby benefiting the research community as a whole.

The development of each REF2029 UoA submission and the list of eligible outputs is an incremental process, and the final submission will evolve through six-monthly REF2029 Review meetings chaired by the PVCR and involving the PVC and EDs, ADRIs, RDs and HoS.

Research outputs are evaluated throughout the REF2029 cycle with decisions made about the final selection of outputs when the profile of the UoA is clear. Internal peer review of outputs by RDs and relevant discipline experts is routine, and the use of additional external peer judgements and metrics is recommended where appropriate. A 13-point rating scale has been implemented in the PURE REF2029 module ranging from -1*, 1*, +1* to -4*, 4*, +4* and is used to rate each output (See Appendix 7 for definition of the 13-point scale).
The 13-point scale allows a degree of differentiation when considering which outputs are the strongest to include in the submission.

Reviewers and advisors are selected based on their research expertise and experience in the field and, in some cases, their previous REF panel experience.

Feedback to researchers regarding the assessment of individual outputs is concise and constructive. The outcomes of the reviews are used to inform modelling exercises which will help determine the optimal UoA submission.

5.2 Process for the Identification of Eligible Research Outputs for SRR Staff

As indicated, the PURE REF2029 module is being used to manage the University's REF2029 submission including the identification, rating and selection of research outputs (see Figure 4).

In the spirit of openness and transparency all staff who have been defined as SRR are invited to propose the research outputs that they wish to be considered for REF2029 via the PURE REF2029 module and are provided with a step-by-step guide on how to do this.

When an SRR member of staff logs into their PURE profile they will see an additional tab called Propose Outputs for REF2029. This view lists all their REF-eligible research outputs and is automatically limited to the REF2029 publication period (1 January 2021 - 31 December 2028). The member of staff can propose as many outputs as they wish and has the option to rank these and provide additional commentary on each of them.

Once the outputs of all SRR staff are proposed, the relevant RD has access to the total pool of outputs proposed for consideration for REF2029. In cases where a member of SRR staff does not propose an eligible output which the RD feels should be considered then the RD can request that this output be added to the proposed pool. If an SRR member of staff is absent long-term the Research Performance team can populate the REF2029 module with their eligible outputs so that the RD can access them and this will be communicated to the absent member of staff.

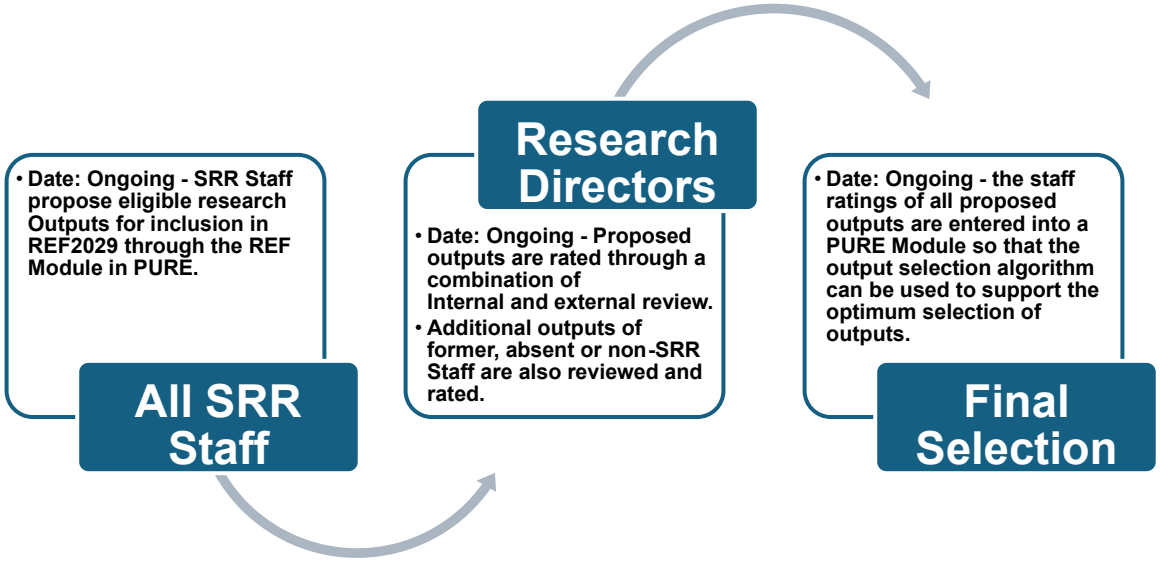


Figure 4: Process for the Identification of Eligible Outputs and the final selection of REF2029 Outputs.

5.3 Process for the Identification of Research Outputs of Former Staff

For REF2029 the submission guidance allows for outputs from former staff and non SRR staff (that is, non-volume-contributing staff), to be added to the submitted pool provided that the output was first made publicly available while the staff member had an eligible employment relationship with the University during the REF2029 assessment period. An eligible employment relationship consists of:

- A minimum of 0.2 fte for at least 12 months continuous employment AND
- A role descriptor which includes an explicit expectation of research activity within the role.

Former staff include:

- staff who have been made compulsorily redundant;
- staff who have been selected for voluntary redundancy or severance;
- staff who have retired;
- staff leaving after the expiry of a fixed-term contract; and
- staff who have moved to another post.

The University reserves the right to include eligible outputs from former staff in circumstances such as retirement, expiration of a fixed-term contract, resignation and voluntary severance and where there is evidence to demonstrate a substantive link to the output.

The University will adhere to the published guidance and not include a sole authored output from a member of staff who was subject to compulsory redundancy unless requested to do so by the respective former colleague.

The relevant RD will identify outputs from former staff and ask the PURE Support team to bring them into the PURE REF2029 module for review and consideration. The Research Performance team will work with the RD to provide evidence of the substantive link to such outputs.

5.4 Identifying substantive link to outputs

Where there is a requirement to provide evidence of a substantive link to outputs the RD will work with the Research Performance team to provide appropriate evidence as defined by the REF2029 sub-panel.

5.5 Portability of outputs

The REF2029 requirement that an HEI must have enabled the research leading to an output, removes the portability of outputs, a feature of previous REF and RAE assessments. However, REF2029 includes a limited exception for long-form and long process outputs and will allow the submission of these output types where an eligible employment relationship occurs with the submitting HEI after the point that the output is first made publicly available for a time-limited period. The University will adhere to the REF2029 guidance in this regard, and the RD will work with the Research Performance team to verify the eligibility of the output.

5.6 Allocating or Assigning Outputs to UoAs

As described in Section 4.1 staff are allocated to the most appropriate UoA according to their discipline. Once the final UoA descriptors are available and in cases where it is felt an output fits better with another UoA there will be a discussion between relevant RDs who each will review the output (see Section 5.1 for details of

review process) and agree on where the output best fits. The potential for cross-referral will also be taken into account in such cases.
Periodic internal review of outputs will identify outputs that are interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary, and these will be reviewed by relevant discipline experts to ensure the most appropriate UoA is selected where the output will receive the strongest peer-review assessment. Decisions will always be based on expert peer review and fit with the relevant UoA descriptor.

5.7 Submitting an output to multiple UoAs

Outputs will be considered for submission to multiple UoAs where it is determined that the specific output meaningfully aligns with the UoA descriptors for each UoA to which it is submitted. Decisions will be taken based on peer review by relevant discipline experts and fit with the relevant UoA descriptor.

5.8 Supporting diversity of outputs

The University will not perceive any particular form of output as of greater or lesser quality than another. It recognises rigorous, significant and original research across multiple purposes, formats, and modes of communication. Ulster University values an inclusive and collaborative research ecosystem that supports a diversity of people, ideas, methodologies, outputs, and activities.

Ulster University proactively encourages and supports all forms of research output and works closely with RDs in valuing outputs and formats that go beyond conventional formats such as journal articles, conference contributions, books, etc. The University has established several working groups to ensure such outputs are understood and presented to their best advantage (for example; Practice as Research (PAR) Working Group; Practice-based Outputs Working Group).

Ulster University ensures that recognised languages are treated in accordance with their legal status and associated protections within relevant jurisdictions. Where research is undertaken with partners or communities in regions where particular languages have protected or official status, the University supports their appropriate recognition and use in research engagement, dissemination and impact activities. This reflects the University's commitment to equality, inclusion, respect for cultural

and linguistic diversity, and meaningful engagement with the communities involved in its research.

The University will also ensure that outputs in languages other than English are not treated less favourably by ensuring appropriate assessment of their quality.

5.9 Process for the Final Selection of Research Outputs for Inclusion in REF2029

No one person will be responsible for the final selection of the outputs to be submitted to REF2029 (see Figure 5).

Unlike REF2021, REF2029 does not require a minimum of one output for every member of SRR staff. To ensure the optimal submission for each UoA, the final selection of outputs is based on their eligibility, fit with the UoA descriptors and quality informed by a combination of internal and external review. The results of the internal and external peer review are uploaded to the PURE algorithm (see Appendix 8).

RDs will be trained on how the PURE algorithm works once it is available from Elsevier. At a minimum the RDs, working with their respective ADRI and the Research Performance team, will be responsible for running the algorithm and ensuring the optimal submission for their UoA. Where there is a pool of outputs which are indistinguishable in terms of quality, the RD will have the flexibility to adjust the algorithm to achieve a submission which is representative in terms of specific research disciplines, interdisciplinarity, collaboration, diversity of outputs and subject areas.

Feedback to researchers regarding the assessment of the outputs will be concise and constructive, and all members of the UoA will be informed of the final selection and the basis on which it was made.

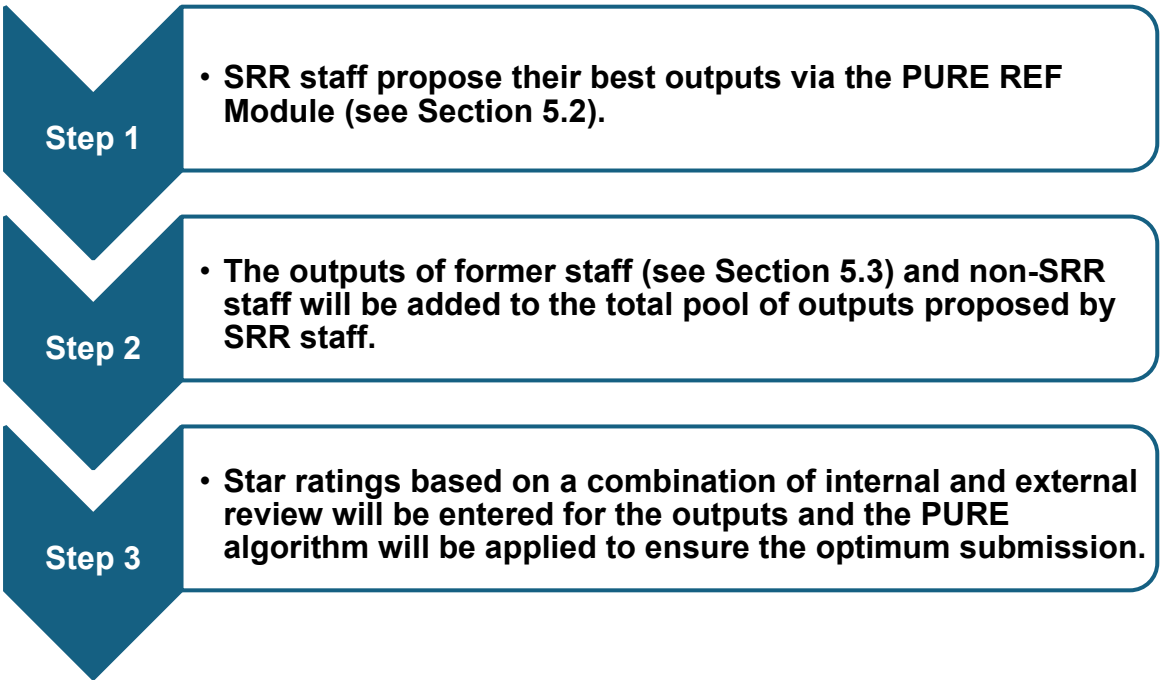


Figure 5: Process for the selection of REF2029 outputs.

5.10 Ensuring submissions are representative of the research undertaken within the submitting unit during the REF period

Section 5.1 above describes our process for the internal and external review of outputs and the selection of outputs using the PURE algorithm. The initial results from the algorithm will be reviewed by the RD, ADRI and HoS to ensure that the range of outputs selected are representative of the range of research activity in the UoA.

Where there is a pool of outputs which are indistinguishable in terms of quality, the RD will have the flexibility to adjust the algorithm to achieve a submission which is representative in terms of specific research disciplines, interdisciplinarity, collaboration, diversity of outputs and subject areas.

The output selection process will neither advantage nor disadvantage any type or source of research, or any form of eligible output. Ulster University recognizes and actively embraces the wide diversity of outputs and RDs and reviewers are expected

to consider all outputs, irrespective of type, and assess their quality against the REF2029 criteria of originality, rigour and significance.

Final decisions on outputs and impact case study selection will also be informed by recommendations from the EIAs which will explore the impact of output selection in relation to protected characteristics.

The introduction of decoupling and the eligibility of outputs from authors not counted in the volume measure enables a greater diversity of outputs to be submitted. Whilst Ulster's intent is to optimise the quality of our submission, we will retain the capacity to adjust our algorithm to ensure that equally scored outputs are scrutinised in terms of representation. Unit level SPRE statements will provide a Statement of Representation describing how the UoA submission reflects the breadth of research undertaken. The statement will also describe how outputs have been selected through transparent processes designed to recognise contributions from a diverse research community including, for example, interdisciplinary researchers, early career researchers and staff with research-enabling responsibilities.

5.11 Responsible research assessment practice

The University recognises the diversity of research outputs, research careers and contributions that collectively enable research excellence.

As a signatory of DORA, the University is committed to a fair, transparent and inclusive selection process grounded in the principles of responsible research assessment (RRA). Discipline-appropriate expert peer review is the corner-stone of RRA at UU and allows for the consideration of a diverse range of research outputs alongside conventional outputs. We place a clear emphasis on the primacy of peer review and our discipline appropriate expert peer review eliminates the use of proxy indicators such as journal based metrics and gives greater weight to research quality, contribution, openness, influence and impact.

The final selection of outputs will be informed by the star ratings determined through a combination of internal and external peer review. The peer review ratings (on a 13-point scale of -1* to +4* (See Appendix 7)) will be entered into our PURE REF2029 Module and an algorithm applied to ensure the optimal submission for

each UoA. The algorithm is driven **solely** by the ratings from the peer review process and the maximum of five outputs attributed to an individual and there is flexibility for RDs to adjust the algorithm where there is found to be any form of underrepresentation.

No one person will be responsible for the final selection of the outputs to be submitted to REF2029. At a minimum the RDs, working with their respective ADRI, HoS and the Research Performance team, will be responsible for running the algorithm and ensuring the optimal submission for their UoA both in terms of representation and excellence.

5.12 Staff, Committees and Training

Please see Part 2, Sections 2.5 to 2.8 for details of Staff, Committees and Training.

5.13 EIA on the Selection of Outputs

This section should be read in conjunction with Section 1.5.2 which details our overall approach and ethos in relation to EIAs.

Feedback as a result of our consultation on the process for the selection of outputs was 100% supportive of the process for identifying, reviewing and selecting outputs. At this stage in the REF cycle it is challenging to conduct a meaningful EIA on the REF2029 output selection process as the University has just over 11,000 outputs produced during the period of which 9,000 are eligible REF output types which is eligible outputs which is 7,000 more outputs than is required for submission to REF2029.

The process of assessing the outputs in terms of their likely contribution to knowledge and understanding is currently underway and this will narrow down the total pool available for selection. Our output selection process involves several rounds of review, calibration exercises, and changing intelligence about REF requirements. An analysis conducted at this early stage would not accurately reflect the final decision-making process as it will not be clear for some time what the shortlist will look like.

The decoupling rules for REF2029 introduce a more institution-focused approach, with outputs forming part of a submission pool rather than being directly linked to

individual staff in the same way as previous exercises. Within individual Units of Assessment (UoAs), the number of staff in particular protected groups may be very small so meaningful quantitative analysis may therefore be impossible without risking identification of individuals or drawing unreliable conclusions.
From the total pool of circa 9000, 836 outputs have been identified as interdisciplinary and, as the available pool for selection is narrowed down, these interdisciplinary outputs will be carefully considered by relevant disciplinary experts and decisions made on the most appropriate UoA allocation(s). An analysis has also taken place of the diverse output types within the pool of 9000 available outputs but, at this early stage, it is not meaningful given that we can submit a 'body of work' which comprises a number of outputs.

Ulster University ensures that recognised languages are treated in accordance with their legal status and associated protections within relevant jurisdictions. Where research is undertaken with partners or communities in regions where particular languages have protected or official status, the University supports their appropriate recognition and use in research engagement, dissemination and impact activities. This reflects the University's commitment to equality, inclusion, respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, and meaningful engagement with the communities involved in its research.

The University will also ensure that outputs in languages other than English, such as Irish or Irish Sign Language, are not treated less favourably by ensuring appropriate assessment of their quality.

Final output selection will not be made until close to the submission deadline to ensure consideration of eligible outputs published later in the cycle. In terms of assigning outputs to UoAs, there is no requirement in the REF2029 rules for selected outputs to be tied to a specific researcher and their allocated UoA. An output can be included in multiple UoAs providing the output meaningfully aligns with the UoA descriptors.

Draft shortlists will be analysed at various stages to validate the extent of representation so that Research Directors can identify any opportunities to advance representation.

If there is clear under or over representation in any area we will firstly review our process to ensure that the process is not, in itself, discriminatory. If the review suggests that there is an issue of restricted opportunity, we will consider appropriate remedial action.

Our EIA on SRR staff and their allocated UoAs shows that all categories are expected to benefit in that our CoP sets out to afford equality of opportunity for all research active staff, regardless of their protected characteristics. Additionally, the new REF2029 rules which do not require a minimum of one output attributed to each member of SRR staff reduces any pressure that may disproportionately affect staff with protected characteristics and limits opportunities for exclusion of any particular group.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Equality Impact Assessment (Equality Screening)

Equality screening pro-forma to be inserted here after public policy screening consultation exercise

Appendix 2: Roles and Responsibilities of Decision-Makers

The roles and responsibilities of the key decision-makers and decision-making bodies in the University's preparations for REF2029 are outlined below.

1. Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research (PVCR)
2. Research Performance Team
3. Impact Team
4. PVC and Executive Deans (PVC and EDs)
5. Associate Deans for Research and Innovation (ADRIs)
6. Research Directors (RDs)
7. Heads of School (HoS)
8. Director of People and Culture - Partnerships and Services

1. Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research (PVCR)

The PVCR is responsible for implementing the University's Research Strategy and is ultimately responsible for the content of the University s REF submission and making key decisions in consultation with relevant staff and bodies (for example: PVC or EDs, ADRIs, RDs and HoS).

The PVCR chairs the majority of research-related committees and all performance monitoring meetings with UoAs and reports on all research and innovation activities through the Research and Innovation Committee (RIC) which is a sub-committee of Senate. The PVCR also reports on research performance and research activities to the University's Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

2. Research Performance Team

The Head of Research Performance, together with the REF Strategy Officer, is responsible for overseeing the co-ordination of the University's REF submission and acting as the institutional contact for REF.

The Research Performance team is responsible for all aspects of the REF submission including:

i. maintaining data in the PURE REF2029 module on SRR Staff, Research Outputs, PhD Completions and Research Income in a format consistent with the funding councils' requirement for REF2029;
ii. ensuring that the integrity of the submission process is upheld through careful guidance to all parties involved in the process and by ensuring the integrity of data in the submissions through data verification;
iii. servicing all REF-related meetings so as to monitor progress in relation to the REF submissions;
iv. advising on the University's overall timetable for preparation of the REF2029 submission;
v. interpreting REF2029 Guidelines and providing guidance on all REF2029related matters to ADRIs, RDs and other relevant staff;
vi. testing and implementing the REF2029 data collection system, and offering guidance, training and advice on its usage across the University;
vii. developing and implementing the REF2029 CoP for Ulster University;
viii. facilitating training on the REF2029 CoP and equality legislation to all staff involved in the REF decision-making process;
ix. providing support and systems to enable staff to achieve excellence in their research and the Open Access of their REF outputs.

3. Impact Team

The Impact team within the Innovation and Enterprise section of the Department for R and I is responsible for enhancing the institutional support for developing impact pathways, creating value within the economy, society, culture, public policy and services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia. Faculty Impact Officers led by an Impact Manager support RDs and Impact Case Study leads in the development of their REF2029 Impact Case Studies and deliver the Impact Development Series suite of training initiatives available to all academic staff.

The selection of Impact Case Studies for REF2029 will be undertaken through a structured decision-making process overseen by an Engagement and Impact Working Group chaired by the Director of Research and Innovation. All decisions will be based on what is in the best overall interest of the University's REF submission,

and all selection outcomes will be final. The University recognises the significant contribution that researchers and their research impact make to our research culture and to wider society. The non-selection of any individual should not be interpreted as a negative judgment on the quality or value of the impact generated; rather it reflects the specific evidential and assessment requirements of the REF. Broader or emerging impact activity from a Unit may instead be reflected within the Strategy, People, Research and Environment (SPRE) element of the UoA submission, where appropriate.

4. PVC and Executive Deans

The PVC and Executive Dean is the most senior member of academic staff in the Faculty. They have leadership responsibility and executive authority for all matters relating to the functioning of each of our Faculties.

5. Associate Deans for Research and Innovation (ADRIs)

ADRIs are research and innovation champions responsible for the delivery of research and innovation performance targets and metrics within their respective Faculties. They are also responsible for overseeing the REF2029 UoA submissions within their respective Faculty. ADRIs are members of the Research Leadership team (RLT), the REF2029 Steering Committee and all REF2029 Working Groups. ADRIs report both to their PVC and Executive Dean and to the PVCR on all research KPIs for their respective Faculties.

6. Research Directors (RDs)

Each REF2029 UoA is led by a Research Director (RD) who has a strong personal record of research achievements in their discipline and a track record of success in the management of research projects.

The key person driving each of Ulster University s REF2029 submissions is the RD who is responsible for developing, preparing and writing the REF submission. The RD (together with the HoS) supports the academic and research staff and research within the submission by ensuring colleagues are given the time and resources necessary to support their work and that Early Career Researchers (ECRs) who demonstrate clear research ability are given every opportunity to fulfil their potential.

The day-to-day management of research is the responsibility of the RD who works closely with HoS on matters of research expectations and performance within the UoA or School and with the ADRI on matters of research strategy and REF. All RDs sit on Faculty or School Boards and HoS attend REF Review meetings.

The role of the RD is to provide strategic leadership and management on all aspects of the work of the UoA and to work in consultation with HoS to identify staff with SRR.

Through six monthly monitoring meetings chaired by the PVCR, RDs report on how they are working to optimize the development and achievements of the UoA so as to maximize performance in the REF. All RDs are members of the Research Directors' Forum which meets quarterly and is chaired by the PVCR. The Research Directors' Forum does not have formal Terms of Reference and is an informal forum where Research Directors discuss best practice and share experiences.

7. Heads of School (HoS)

HoS work closely with RDs on matters of research expectations and performance within the UoA or School). They are involved in meetings with all academic and research staff to discuss and agree their SRR status for REF2029 and attend all research monitoring meetings chaired by the PVCR.

HoS are responsible for encouraging academic and research staff to engage with the University s Research Development Programme and, as part of the research trilateral meetings with staff, HoS actively encourage staff to avail of the Research Support Services.

8. Director of People and Culture Partnerships and Services

The Director of People and Culture Partnerships and Services has an advisory role and sits on the REF2029 Steering Group.

Appendix 3: REF-Related Committees - Terms of Reference and Membership

Committee Structure

Figures 6 and 7 below show the University's committee structure for research and include any REF2029 related working groups. All research and REF-related committees and working groups are serviced by the Research Performance team with all agendae, papers and minutes stored on a secure SharePoint site.

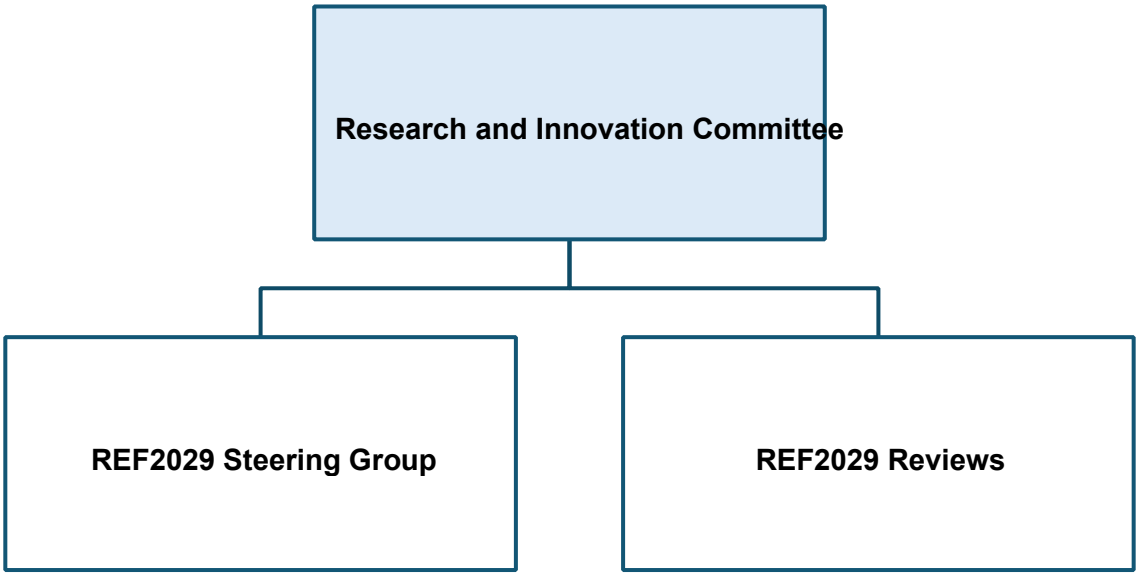


Figure 6: Research Related Committee Structure

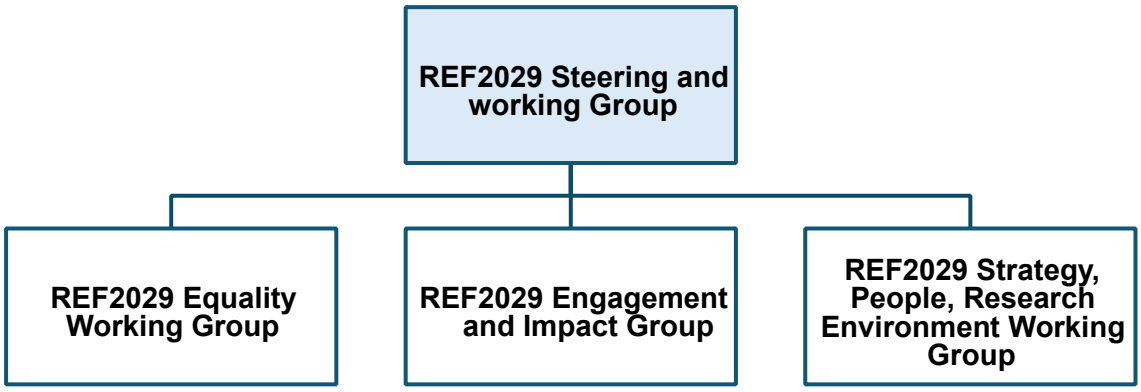


Figure 7: REF2029 Committees and Working Groups

Committees and Working Groups

1. Research and Innovation Committee (RIC)

RIC meets three times a year and reports to the University's Senate. RIC is responsible for the formulation, monitoring, delivery and implementation of the University's Research Strategy.

2. REF2029 Steering Group

The REF2029 Steering Group reports to Research and Innovation Committee. Its primary role is to provide strategic guidance on the development of the REF2029 submission.

3. REF Reviews and Mock REFs

The University's organisational structure for research management facilitates the monitoring and evaluation of each UoA's research performance for REF through six monthly review meetings. A full mock REF2029 will be scheduled for May 2028 and more frequent review meetings will take place in the run-up to the REF submission deadline in 2028.

There are no formal Terms of Reference for REF review meetings which are chaired by the PVCR. Each meeting is attended by the relevant PVC and ED, ADRI, RD and HoS and all meetings are serviced by the Research Performance team.

For the review meetings RDs are required to report on a range of REF indicators:

- SRR status of staff;
- publications and other research outputs; REF OA compliance;
- external income;
- PhD completions;
- people, culture and environment;
- impact.

4. REF2029 Equality Working Group (REFEWG)

The purpose of the REF2029 Equality Working Group is to ensure that the University meets its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion obligations in the development of the University's REF2029 submission and to monitor the implementation of the CoP through regular equality screening at institutional and UoA level. The REFEWG is chaired by the Dean of EDI.

5. REF2029 Strategy, People and Research Environment Working Group

The purpose of the REF2029 SPRE Working Group is to develop the University's Institutional Level Statement (ILS) for the SPRE element of REF2029.

6. REF2029 Engagement and Impact Working Group

The purpose of the REF2029 Engagement and Impact Working Group is to support Research Directors and Impact Case Study leads in the development of REF2029 ICSs.

7. Research Directors' Forum

Quarterly meetings chaired by the PVCR are held with ADRIs and RDs. These meetings are informal and have no formal Terms of Reference. The meetings cover a variety of research related matters including REF. Once the final REF2029 Guidance on Submissions is published the focus of these meetings is narrowed down to specific aspects of REF and includes sharing of good practice and REF-specific training.

RESEARCH and INNOVATION COMMITTEE Sub-Committee of the SENATE
Terms of Reference

1. To oversee the formulation, monitoring, delivery and implementation of the University's Research Strategy and supporting innovation strategies.
2. To oversee the implementation of the Delegated Authority Framework as it pertains to Research and Innovation.
3. To advise and make recommendations to the Senate on:
   i. matters relating to the organisation of, and support services for, Research and Innovation; ii. both internal and external funding of Research and Innovation and related matters,
   iii. policy in relation to PhD researchers, intellectual property, including patents and inventions; technology transfer; consultancy and related matters; incubator units and spin-out companies; and the social, economic and cultural impact of research;
   iv. policy in relation to national and international research collaboration;
   v. policy in relation to the governance of research, including the promotion of good practice and the principles of research integrity;
   vi. criteria and procedures for the monitoring and assessment of Research and Innovation performance against KPIs and priorities.
4. To consider any other matters relating to Research and Innovation policy and practice which the Senate may require.
5. To receive reports:
   i. on progress against Faculty KPIs (Associate Deans for R and I);
   ii. on progress against agreed priorities within the R and I Strategy (R and I Team leads);
   iii. on progress on the development of the University s REF submission and associated REF Code of Practice;
   iv. on progress of the City Deal Projects;
   v. and consider recommendations from the Doctoral College Board which will oversee the recruitment, admission, supervision, training, progress and examination of research students; and make recommendations related to Ulster s research degree programme;
   vi. and consider recommendations from the Research Governance and Integrity Steering Committee which oversees the implementation of policies and procedures for the governance of research which involves human participants, animals and other regulatory considerations;
   vii. and consider recommendations from the Research Culture Steering Committee, which oversees the development of the University's research culture and community and receive reports on progress and actions relating to the University s policies in relation to contract

research staff, the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and the HR Excellence in Research Award. 6. To establish, whether from within its own membership or otherwise, ad hoc sub-committees and advisory groups, to advise and report on any of the above matters; and 7. To charge the ad hoc sub-committees or working groups that might be established from time to time, with tasks and initiatives, in pursuit of the University's Research and Innovation strategy.
In reaching decisions the Committee will have due regard to their impact on, and implications for, the University's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and good relations as outlined in its Equality Scheme, and associated policies and, where possible and practicable, the Committee will ensure that its actions are proactive in this respect.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE COMMITTEE OF THE SENATE Membership
Chair
PVC (Research)
Members
Chief People Officer Dean of Postgraduate Research and Director of the Ulster Doctoral College Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Dean of Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility Director for Research Director of Global Engagement, International Admissions and The Compliance Team Associate Deans (Research and Innovation) Six members elected by the Research Active Constituency Co-opted members as required Research Staff Development Officer Senate Representatives Library Representative Finance Representatives Quality Enhancement Representative UUSU Representative ECR Representative PhD Representative
In Attendance

Deputy Director of Research Head of Research Governance and Integrity Head of Research Performance Head of Research Development Head of Innovation and Impact Head of Research Management

REF2029 STEERING GROUP (Sub-group of Research and Innovation Committee)
Purpose
The REF2029 Steering Group reports to Research and Innovation Committee. Its primary role is to provide strategic guidance on the development of the REF2029 submission and oversee the University's adherence to the REF2029 guidelines.
Terms of Reference
1. provide guidance on the University's strategy and timetable for preparing the REF2029 submission; 2. overseeing the development and approval of the University s REF2029 Code of Practice; 3. overseeing compliance with the University's Code of Practice on the fair and transparent identification of staff with SRR, determining who is an independent researcher, and the processes for the selection of outputs; 4. overseeing the work of the various REF2029 Working Groups: • REF2029 Equality Working Group • REF2029 SPRE Working Group • REF2029 Engagement and Impact Working Group 5. the provision of crucial guidance, support and critical feedback to Research Directors on the development the REF submissions; 6. advise on selection of UoAs to be submitted; 7. providing a forum through which good ideas and practice can be shared; and 8. determine specific actions to be undertaken to support the development of the submission.
Frequency of Meetings
To be determined
Secretariat
Research Performance Team
In reaching decisions the Committee will have due regard to their impact on, and implications for, the University's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and good relations as outlined in its Equality Scheme, and associated policies and, where possible and practicable, the Committee will ensure that its actions are proactive in this respect.

REF2029 STEERING GROUP (Sub-group of Research and Innovation Committee) Membership
Chair
PVC (Research)
Members
Director of People and Culture – Partnerships and Services Dean of the Ulster Doctoral College and Chair of the REF2029 SPRE Working Group Dean of EDI and Chair of the REF2029 Equality Working Group Associate Deans for Research and Innovation (1 per Faculty) Director of Research and Chair of the REF2029 Engagement and Impact Working Group REF2029 Panel Members

Head of Research Performance REF Strategy Manager Co-options as required

REF2029 EQUALITY WORKING GROUP (Sub-group of REF2029 Steering Group)
Terms of Reference
The purpose of the REF2029 Equality Working Group is to monitor the implementation of the processes within the Code of Practice through regular EIAs to ensure that the University meets its obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act and the UK funding bodies. The REF2029 Equality Working Group will: 1. Equality screen (that is: equality impact assessment) the processes for: • identifying staff with significant responsibility for research (SRR); • determining research independence; • selecting outputs, including the processes used to assess research quality (that is, metrics). 2. Revise and improve the processes within the CoP as required based on the outcome of screening. 3. Undertake and publish, after the submission deadline, an equality impact assessment based on the final submission; and report the findings to Research and Innovation Committee and Senior Leadership Team so as to further develop the research profile of any group or groups shown to be underrepresented in the REF2029 submission; and 4. Provide advice and guidance on issues relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in relation to the preparation of the REF2029 submission; and 5. Make appropriate recommendations to the REF2029 Steering Group following the completion of Equality Impact Assessments.
Frequency of Meetings
To be determined
Secretariat

Research Performance Team
In reaching decisions the Committee will have due regard to their impact on, and implications for, the University's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and good relations as outlined in its Equality Scheme, and associated policies and, where possible and practicable, the Committee will ensure that its actions are proactive in this respect.

REF2029 EQUALITY WORKING GROUP (Sub-group of REF2029 Steering Group) Membership
Chair
Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
Members
Head of Research Performance REF Strategy Officer ADRI and RD Representation Co-options as required

REF2029 SPRE WORKING GROUP (Sub-group of REF2029 Steering Group)
Terms of Reference
The primary role of the REF2029 SPRE Working Group is to develop the University s Institutional Level Statement (ILS) for the SPRE element of REF2029. In undertaking this, the Group will: 1. Review the various components of the SPRE template and the associated guidance; 2. Oversee the development of the overarching institutional statement on research strategy, people, culture, and environment 3. Consider the data requirements for both the ILS and the ULS; 4. Ensure alignment, consistency between institutional and unit statements, providing guidance, templates and support for UoAs 5. Ensure the infrastructure is in place to collect and manage the data associated with the ILS and ULS; (HR, research systems, EDI, PGR, KE, infrastructure); 6. Provide validation and quality assurance of all areas of data relating to the ILS and ULS; and 7. Monitor the internal review of ULS.
Frequency of Meetings
To be determined
Secretariat
Research Performance Team

In reaching decisions the Committee will have due regard to their impact on, and implications for, the University's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and good relations as outlined in its Equality Scheme, and associated policies and, where possible and practicable, the Committee will ensure that its actions are proactive in this respect.

REF2029 SPRE WORKING GROUP (Sub-group of REF2029 Steering Group) Membership
Chair
Dean of Doctoral College
Core Members
ADRIs Head of Research Performance P and C People Lead Research Culture Manager REF Strategy Officer REF Engagement Officer Open Research Representative RD Representation Co-options as required.

REF2029 IMPACT and ENGAGEMENT WORKING GROUP (Sub-group of REF2029 Steering Group)
Terms of Reference
The primary role of the REF2029 Impact and Engagement Working Group is to support Research Directors and Impact Case Study leads in the development of REF2029 ICSs. In undertaking this, the Group will: 1. consider the various components of the ICS template and the associated guidance; 2. consider the data requirements for the ICS; 3. monitor the internal (and external) review of the Impact Case Studies; 4. ensure the infrastructure is in place to support the ICS leads to develop and evidence their ICS; 5. to provide validation and quality assurance on all areas of data and evidence required for the ICS; and 6. support RDs in determining the final selection of ICS.
Frequency of Meetings
To be determined
Secretariat
Impact Team

In reaching decisions the Committee will have due regard to their impact on, and implications for, the University's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and good relations as outlined in its Equality Scheme, and associated policies and, where possible and practicable, the Committee will ensure that its actions are proactive in this respect.

REF2029 IMPACT and ENGAGEMENT WORKING GROUP (Sub-group of REF2029 Steering Group) Membership
Chair
Director of Research
Members
Associate Deans for R and I Head of Innovation and Enterprise Impact Manager Research Performance Representation RD Representation Co-options as required

Appendix 4: REF2029 Definition of SRR and Research Independence

REF2029 Definition of SRR

Contracts with significant responsibility for research are those for whom explicit time and resources are made available, to engage actively in independent research, and that is an expectation of the job role.

Explicit tme and resources are made available

- a specific proportion of time allocated for research, as determined in the context of the institution's practices, and applied in a consistent and equitable way.
- research allocation in a workload model.

To engage actively independent research

- eligibility to apply for external research funding as the lead or co-applicant.

- access to research leave or sabbaticals.
- membership of research centres or institutes within the HEI.

and that is an expectation of the job role

- current research responsibilities as indicated in, eg: career pathways or stated objectives.
- expectations of research by role as indicated in, eg: job descriptions and appraisals.

REF2029 Definition of Research Independence

For the purpose of REF, an independent researcher is defined as an individual who undertakes self-directed research rather than carrying out another individual's research programme.

Possible indicators of independence are listed below. It should be noted that each indicator may not individually demonstrate independence and, where appropriate, multiple factors may need to be considered. The following indicators are considered appropriate by all Main Panels:

- Leading or acting as principal investigator or equivalent on an externally funded research project
- Holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship where research independence is a requirement.
- Leading a research group or a substantial or specialised work package.

with the following additional indicators being considered appropriate for Main Panels C and D:

- Being named as a Co-I on an externally funded research grant or award.
- Having significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research.

A person is not deemed to have undertaken independent research purely on the basis that they are named on one or more research outputs.

Appendix 5: SRR Pro-Forma

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REF2029 SRR PRO-FORMA

Name (Please Print)

SRR Status (Please tick):

- ✈ SRR
- ✈ Non-SRR
- ✈ SRR Pending

For SRR status please tick the appropriate indicators:

Explicit time and resources

- A specific proportion of time allocated for a range of research activity as agreed in annual research plans or DAR;
- Access to research support in the form of training programmes, sabbaticals, mentoring and peer review (see Research Support Services Handbook); and
- Access to internal Unit of Assessment funds in support of research.

To engage actively in independent research

For the purposes of the REF, an independent researcher is defined as an individual who undertakes self-directed research, rather than carrying out another individual's research programme.

Indicators of 'independent' research include (but are not limited to):

- eligibility to apply for external research funding as the lead or co-applicant.
- holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship where research independence is a requirement.
- leading a research group or a substantial work package.
- significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research.
- acting as Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator on a competitively won. externally funded research project since 2021.
- demonstrating research impact and demonstrating research impact with use of knowledge exchange income publication of full peer-reviewed paper or other form of assessable research output (as described in Annex ???? of the REF2029 Guidance on Submissions) since 2021.
- PhD, Postdoc and Research Assistant supervision and line-management since 2021.

It is important to note that a single indicator in itself may not individually demonstrate independence, and it is expected that staff should be able to demonstrate research activity over a range of indicators commensurate with their discipline, their role, their FTE status and also taking into account individual staff circumstances. **Active engagement in independent research is an expectation of their job role**. Indicators of this 'expectation' are:

- time allocated to research as indicated in annual teaching and research planning meetings or DAR.
- clear, identifiable, measurable and manageable research targets which have been agreed by the individual with the relevant Research Director on an annual basis.

For non-SRR status please tick the appropriate indicators (if applicable).

More significant responsibility for:

- Teaching Activities
- Administration
- Scholarship
- Professional Practice
- Knowledge exchange

- (Other) please specify:

Please articulate clearly why the individual named above is designated as non-SRR:

For SRR Pending status the following should be agreed at the trilateral (please tick to confirm):

- clear, identifiable, measurable and manageable research expectations.
- a future date for reviewing these expectations and the individual's SRR status Please confirm that the individual has been directed to our Research Support Webpages.

Member of Staff: ……

Head of School: ……..

Research Director: ……..

Date of SRR Trilateral: ……

Appendix 6: Briefing Document on Research Independence

1. What is REF2029?

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the UK's system for assessing the excellence of research in UK higher education providers (HEIs). The REF outcomes are used to inform the allocation of around 2 billion per year of public funding for universities research.

The REF was first carried out in 2014, replacing the previous Research Assessment Exercise. Research England manages the REF on behalf of all four UK higher education funding bodies. The funding bodies shared policy aim for research assessment is to secure a world-class, dynamic and responsive research base across the full academic spectrum within UK higher education.

The REF objectives are to:

- provide accountability for public investment in research and produce evidence of the benefits of this investment;
- provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks, for use in the higher education sector and for public information; and
- inform the selective allocation of funding for research Full details of the REF 2029 process can be found at this link.

2. Contributing to the Volume Measure for REF2029

The Volume Measure (that is, the fte of staff with significant responsibility for research (SRR)) allows the REF team to determine the research capacity of a HEI and to calculate how many research outputs and impact case studies a HEI should submit for assessment. The funding bodies may also use the volume measure to inform the allocation of block grant funding.

3. Contracts Included in the Volume Measure

Eligible contracts include staff whose primary employment function is Research Only AND where the staff member:

- meets the criteria for research independence; and
- is on the payroll of the University within the REF2029 period, that is, 1st August 2025 to 31st July 2027.

4. Definition of Research Independence

A research-only contract is considered to demonstrate research independence if the staff member undertakes self-directed research, rather than primarily carrying out another individual's research programme.

4.1 Indicators of Research Independence

Contracts typically exhibiting research independence (RI) are those were staff members:

- Act as lead applicant on externally funded research projects.
- Hold an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship requiring research independence (see indicative list of research fellowships).
- Lead a research group or a substantial or specialist 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 or award.
    - Having significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research.

4.2 Expectation of Indicators

Meeting all indicators is not mandatory and the indicators provided above are examples only. Please see Section 3 for further details on our processes for identifying staff with research independence.

5. Research Assistants

Research Assistants are primarily employed to support another individual s research rather than pursuing independent research.
It is on ly in exceptional cases that the contracts of research assistants who meet the definition of an independent researcher can be included in the volume measure.

6. Are you an independent researcher?

If, as a member of research only staff, you feel that you meet any of the independent re-searcher indicators noted above, you should complete the attached pro-forma and submit this to your Research Director by no later than 30 June.

It is important to note that a single indicator in itself may not demonstrate independence, and it is expected that staff should be able to demonstrate research activity over a range of indicators commensurate with their discipline, their role, and their FTE status.

REF2029
Research Excellence Framework

REF2029 Research Independence Pro-Forma

REF2029 Research Only Staff

If, as a member of Research Only staff, you feel that you meet the definition of an independent researcher, you should complete the form below and submit this to your Research Director as soon as possible and by no later than 30 June.

If, at the time of the submission of the pro-forma, evidence of your independence is not available then your independent status will be kept as pending until all evidence is available.

Name (Please Print):
REF2029 Unit of Assessment:

Please identify how and why you meet any of the possible indicators of research independence listed below with a view to determining whether you undertake self-directed research, rather than carrying out another individual s research programme.

It is important to note that a single indicator in itself may not individually demonstrate independence, and it is expected that staff should be able to demonstrate research activity over a range of indicators com-mensurate with their discipline, their role, their FTE status and also taking into account individual staff circumstances.

Criteria	**Comment**
Leading or acting as a principal investigator or equivalent on an externally funded research project.	
Holding an independently won competitively awarded fellow ship where research independence is a requirement. This list of research fellowships provides some examples of such fellowships but is not exhaustive.	
Leading a research group or substantial work package.	
Eligibility to apply for external research funding as the lead or co-applicant.	

Demonstrating research impact and	
demonstrating research impact with use of knowledge exchange income.	
Publication of full peer-reviewed paper or other form of assessable research output (as described in the REF2029 Guidance on Submissions) since 2021.	
PhD, Postdoc or Research Assistant supervision or line management since 2021.	
In the case of UOAs in REF Main Panels C and D, these supplementary indicators should also be considered:	
Being named as a Co-I on an externally funded research grant or award.	
Having significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research.	

Appendix 7: 13 Point Rating Scale for Outputs

The criteria for assessing the quality of outputs are 'Originality, Significance and Rigour'	
+4*	Quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
4*	
-4*	
+3*	Quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
3*	
-3*	
+2*	Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
2*	
-2*	
+1*	Quality that is recognised nationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
1*	
-1*	
Unclassified	Quality that falls below the standard of nationally recognised work. Or work which does not meet the published definition of research for the purposes of this assessment.

Appendix 8: Glossary of Abbreviations

Glossary of Abbreviations	
ADRI	Associate Dean for Research and Innovation
CKU	Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding
CoP	Code of Practice
CRS	Contract Research Staff
ECR	Early Career Researcher
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
E and I	Engagement and Impact
EIA	Equality Impact Assessment
fte	Full-time equivalent
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HoS	Head of School
ILS	Institutional Level Statement
KE	Knowledge Exchange
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
PaR	Practice as Research
PGR	Post Graduate Researcher
P and C	People and Culture
People XD	Ulster University's Human Resource Database
PURE	Ulster University's Research Information Management System
PVCR	Pro Vice Chancellor Research
PVC AQSE	Pro Vice Chancellor Academic Quality and Student Experience
PVC and ED	Pro Vice Chancellor and Executive Dean
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
RD	Research Director
REF	Research Excellence Framework
REFEWG	REF2029 Equality Working Group
RIC	Research and Innovation Committee
RLT	Research Leadership Team
RO	Research Only
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SPRE	Strategy, People and Research Environment
SRR	Significant Responsibility for Research
ULS	Unit Level Statement
UoA	Unit of Assessment