



Senior Distinguished Research Award

Guidance Notes
October 2025

www.ulster.ac.uk/awards/research-excellence-awards

SENIOR DISTINGUISHED RESEARCH AWARD CATEGORY

1. INTRODUCTION

As part of its strategy for supporting research excellence, Ulster University wishes to recognise the outstanding scholarly accomplishment of staff members. This indicator of recognition is in the form of an annual *Senior Distinguished Research Award*.

2. ELIGIBILITY

Any member of Academic/Research staff who has at least 15 years in an Academic/Research post.

3. CRITERIA/SCORING

The Senior Distinguished Research Award is for staff members who have compiled a substantial and continuing record of outstanding research and scholarly activity and who have profoundly contributed to their field in a leadership capacity. Nominees for this Award must have achieved pre-eminence in their field both nationally and internationally and must provide demonstrable evidence of substantive leadership achievements across the range of the Award criteria.

The Senior Distinguished Research Award is a competitive process and the criteria/scoring that will be used in the selection process for successful applicants are as follows:

a) Outputs/Publications (35%)

A record of research outputs judged to be internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour with at least one of these outputs judged to be world-leading. Nominees are asked to provide details of their best 3 research outputs outlining why they are considered important;

b) Impact (20%)

Evidence of having generated substantial and sustained research impact as per HEFCE's definition of impact for REF (See Appendix);

c) Evidence of Sustained Leadership and contribution to Research, Culture and Environment (25%)

A record of delivering sustained research leadership as evidenced by roles and responsibilities that extend beyond individual or group research activities, e.g. successful staff/PhD supervision; directing major funding initiatives that involve a significant number of academic colleagues and/or stakeholders; management of recognised University Centres or Institutes; large scale national or international collaborations. Evidence of supporting and developing a rich Research Culture and environment at Ulster and contribution to the [Research Culture strategic priorities](#) i.e. supporting collaboration and collegiality and career development within the unit; engaging with or supporting responsible research and Open Research practices:

ensuring research ethics and integrity of highest standards; recognising research diversity and contributions; engaging in and supporting collaboration within university and externally and encouraging fairness, equality, collegiality and networking.

d) Sustained Research Funding (20%)

A record of external research funding at a level commensurate with the discipline (Note: consideration will be given as to whether the nominee is PI on an award and to the prestigious nature of the funding and whether overheads were obtained.)

e) In assessing submissions, the Awards Panel/Committee will take account of any situation where the nominee has lost time in their career through family commitments, illness, late entry into higher education, part-time status or other individual staff circumstances. In the event of such circumstances being pertinent, the application should highlight that they wish special circumstances to be considered and include details of the time period(s) that the individual was away from the University.

Additional Notes:

- **Academic/Research post** – is defined as from Lecturer/Research Fellow level and above and is defined as having a contract of employment, either full-time or part-time, within a HEI or closely related organisation, whether in the UK or overseas which lists research as a primary function.
- **Eligibility Number of Years:** Any member of Academic/Research staff who has at least 15 years in an Academic/Research post (i.e. Lecturer/Research Fellow level and above), at the closing date for receipt of applications /nominations.
- Applicants can only submit an application to one of the individual Awards categories, so it is important to review the eligibility criteria as set out in the Guidance Notes for each category and choose the most appropriate category.
- Previous Faculty winners can re-apply, but previous Champion winners (in this category or the formerly named the Senior Distinguished Research Fellowship Award) cannot be a Champion winner again in the same category.

4. APPLICATION/NOMINATION PROCESS

1. Nominations may be initiated by peers or line managers and self-nominations are also permitted. In the case of a peer-initiated nomination, the nominator must notify the candidate and secure his/her approval prior to the submission of the application.
2. The following forms/supporting documentation must be submitted to the relevant Associate Dean (Research & Innovation) **by 12 noon on Friday 16 January 2026.**

Senior Distinguished Research Award 2025/26 Application Form which includes:

a) *A Statement of Nomination and Research Contributions (maximum 1500 words)*

- The nature and significance of the nominee's research accomplishments including a brief statement on how the nominee, if successful, would use the Award to further their research;

- The nominee's academic impact on their department or the University, including intellectual stimulation and development of colleagues and students and influence on the excellence and the creativity of research and other scholarly activities of the department or University.
- b) Information and evidence to meet criteria a) to d) and if appropriate, e) special circumstances section, as detailed in section 3 above (maximum 1500 words);*
- c) A supporting statement from the Research Director who will be asked to endorse the evidence provided on the nominee's research and scholarly accomplishments and to indicate that the nominee's achievements in relation to the criteria are at a level commensurate with the discipline.*
- d) A signed statement will also be required from a senior individual external to the University who holds a leadership role within the nominee's discipline and a form of words for this statement is included with the application form.*

Please note: There are various elements to this application form i.e. Research Director Statement and Statement of Nomination and external signed statement - so please allow sufficient time to complete these prior to the deadline for submissions.

All forms and guidelines can be downloaded here <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/awards/research-excellence-awards>

5. ASSESSMENT PANEL FOR FACULTY AND CHAMPION AWARDS

Faculty Award

- a) The Associate Dean for Research & Innovation will convene a panel comprising a number of Research Directors and/or other senior academic staff (at the discretion of the ADRI) to review all the applications received by the Faculty. Panel members will receive the reports on the nominee's research outputs, grants and PhD supervision, by the Department for Research & Innovation. Applicants will be ranked based on criteria a) to d) as described in section 3, with consideration given to responses on any special circumstances, as appropriate.
- b) A scoring matrix will be used by the panel; and all applicants scored against each of the essential criteria. The criteria will carry the following weightings: outputs/publications (35%), impact (20%), evidence of sustained leadership and research culture (25%) and sustained research funding (20%). A score of zero in any category for any applicant will eliminate them from that year's competition.
- c) The details of the highest-ranking Faculty applicant will be conveyed to the PVC Research, as a recipient of the Faculty Award and further consideration for the overall Champion Award.
- d) The decision of the Associate Dean for Research & Innovation pertaining to the highest-ranking Faculty nominee as the recipient of the Faculty Award will be final.

Champion Award

- a) An Awards Committee will be appointed annually with the PVC Research serving as the non-voting Chair. The Awards Committee will receive details of each of the Faculty Award winner nominations (from all 4 faculties) for selection of the overall Senior Distinguished Research Award Champion. The Awards voting membership of the Committee will be comprised of Associate Deans for Research & Innovation. To recognise the role of the Awards scheme in the development of staff as excellent researchers, a representative from People and Culture will also be a non-voting member of the Awards Committee.
- b) Members of the Awards Committee will receive all documentation from the four faculty winner nominees. In addition, they will receive the data report on the nominee's research outputs, grants and PhD supervision, by the Department for Research & Innovation.
- c) A scoring matrix will be used by which Awards Committee members (with the exception of the Chair and the other non-voting members in attendance) will score applicants against each of the essential criteria. The criteria will carry the following weightings: outputs/publications (35%), impact (20%), evidence of sustained leadership and research culture (25%) and sustained research funding (20%). A score of zero in any category for any applicant will eliminate them from that year's competition.

In making its decisions the Panel/Committee will take account of the material presented to it and judge it solely on the quality and volume of the contributions made. The Panel/Committee will also give significance to the nominee's statement on how they would use the Award to further their research work. As appropriate, certified achievements attained at any relevant previous employment prior to joining Ulster University will be taken into account when assessing nominees in keeping with the eligibility criteria.

The Panel/Committee will take into account any situations where the nominee has lost time in their career through family commitments, illness, late entry into higher education, part-time status or other individual staff circumstances. In the event of such circumstances being pertinent, the applicant has been asked to highlight the case in which special circumstances should be taken into account and to quantify the time period(s) that they were away from the University.

6. NOTIFICATION

All nominees will be informed of the outcome in Spring 2026. The winners will be honoured at the Research Excellence Awards ceremony in May 2026.

Definition of impact for the REF

For the purposes of the REF, impact is defined as an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia.

Impact includes, but is not limited to, an effect on, change or benefit to:

- the activity, attitude, awareness, behaviour, capacity, opportunity, performance, policy, practice, process or understanding
- of an audience, beneficiary, community, constituency, organisation or individuals
- in any geographic location whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.

Impact includes the reduction or prevention of harm, risk, cost or other negative effects.

For the purposes of the impact element of the REF:

- a) Academic impacts on research or the advancement of academic knowledge (whether in the UK or internationally) are excluded. (The submitted unit's contribution to academic research and knowledge is assessed within the 'outputs' and 'environment' elements of REF.)
- b) Impacts on students, teaching or other activities both within and/or beyond the submitting HEI are included. The 'Panel criteria' (paragraphs 301 to 302) sets out the panels' expectations for impact in this area.

Impacts will be assessed in terms of their 'reach and significance' regardless of the geographic location in which they occurred, whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally. The UK funding bodies expect that many impacts will contribute to the economy, society and culture within the UK, but equally value the international contribution of UK research.

Source: <https://2021.ref.ac.uk/publications-and-reports/guidance-on-submissions-201901/index.html> (page 68)



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