University of Cambridge
Research Excellence Framework 2021
Code of Practice

Part One: Introduction

1. This Code of Practice sets out the development and application of the processes that will govern the preparation of the REF2021 submission of the University of Cambridge. As per Research England guidance, the Code of Practice has been developed to deliver fair and transparent processes for the identification of staff with significant responsibility for research; the determination of who is an independent researcher; and selection of the highest quality research outputs. The Code applies to all academic University staff and throughout this document, the phrase ‘University staff’ refers to eligible University employees and eligible College employees, on an equivalent basis.

2. The Code of Practice aims to support the mission of the University of Cambridge, which is to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence. The Code of Practice governs all decisions relating to REF2021 and adheres to the University’s core values of freedom of thought and expression and freedom from discrimination.

Equality and Diversity

3. The University of Cambridge Research Excellence Framework 2021 Code of Practice was drafted with reference to the good practice guidance regarding equality and diversity matters contained within the Draft Guidance on Codes of Practice. The Code of Practice was developed in accordance with the aims and objectives of the University’s Equality and Diversity Strategy 2016 – 2021, which is underpinned by strong foundations of institutional policy and resource commitment, legal compliance, specific objectives and senior engagement secured over the last few years. The University’s commitment is further evidenced by the University’s Athena SWAN University Silver Award and its forthcoming application for a Race Quality Charter Award in 2019.

4. In accordance with University policy all staff must undergo training in equality and diversity, before beginning the process of staff identification and output selection. Completion of this training will be monitored and reported in future EAAs.

5. The Code of Practice has been drafted in partnership with the University’s Equality and Diversity office, and in consultation across the collegiate University through a combination of meetings, workshops and briefings, and an online survey consultation with individual staff across the collegiate University and with staff representative groups and bodies including the Trades Unions, Postdoctoral Societies, representatives of College
staff, the University Gender Equality Steering Group, and various equality-related networks such as WSN, BAME network, LGBT+ network and the SPACE network.

6. The Equality Analysis for the REF2021 will be reviewed and updated at key stages of the REF process:

   Stage 1: An initial Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the development of the Code of Practice.
   Stage 2: A review of the outcomes of the University mock REF2021 submission in July 2019.
   Stage 3: As part of the preparation for the final submission

7. The implementation of the University Code of Practice is informed by the approved Unit of Assessment Criteria and Working Methods (CWM). The specific arrangements for the implementation of the Code of Practice by UoA Committees are set out in the relevant sections of Parts 2, 3 and 4.

8. The Code of Practice pays due regard to the recommendations of the General Board review of the operational arrangements of REF2014 conducted by the University in 2015 and the Equality Analysis of REF2014 conducted in 2015.

**Governance and Decision-Making**

9. The specific arrangements for the governance of the University’s preparation and submission to REF2021 are outlined below:

   a. **Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research**
      In accordance with Statute C, III, 7 of the University’s Statutes and Ordinances, the Vice-Chancellor has delegated responsibility for the compilation and submission of REF2021 to the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Research (PVC-R). The PVC-R in turn, is required to report to the General Board of the Faculties, which is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor.

   b. **Research Policy Committee**
      The Research Policy Committee (RPC) is a sub-committee of the General Board. It is responsible for research policy and cross-School initiatives and advises on strategic matters relating to the research activities of the University including REF. Its membership includes PVC-R and the six Heads of School. The Head of the Research Office is an attending Officer.

   c. **REF Project Board**
      The Project Board ratifies REF policy and strategy for submission to the General Board for approval. It is an ad hoc committee, established by the General Board and chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Academic Strategy and Planning. Members include senior academic and professional services staff of Collegiate Cambridge.
d. **REF Steering Group**

The REF Steering Group provides operational oversight of the REF processes and advises on key REF policies. Members include the PVC-R, the Heads of School and the Head of the University Research Office.

e. **The Schools**

The Heads of School, supported by the Secretaries of School, provide academic and administrative oversight of the operation of UOA Committees, liaising as required with the REF Office (described in g.), the PVC-R and the REF Steering Group.

f. **Units of Assessment Committees**

The University’s operational plans for REF2021 require the establishment of a local UoA Committee to support the nominated UoA Chair in the preparation the Unit’s REF submission. UoA Committees are responsible for the preparation of all aspects of the UoA submission as set out in the UoA Criteria and Working Methods.

g. **REF Manager and Central REF Office**

The Head of the Cambridge Research Office and the REF Manager have delegated responsibility through the Registrary to act as Head and Deputy Head of the University REF Office and will oversee all administrative and support functions for REF2021.

10. The University has followed a two-phased strategy for communication and dissemination of the Code of Practice in accordance with its overall REF Communications Strategy which is underpinned by the principles of fairness, inclusiveness and transparency. Communications specifically related to the Code of Practice include:

a. **Phase One (October 2017 – Spring 2019):** A broad campaign to inform staff about the background to REF2021, Research England’s procedures for the operation of REF2021, the REF timetable and University preparations for the submission. The PVC-R and the REF Office hold termly meetings with the UOA Chairs and UOA Administrators. Pertinent information is also communicated through targeted briefings, web updates and email/digital communications.

b. **Phase Two (March 2019 – June 2019):** Launch of formal consultation on the Code of Practice with multiple channels for feedback designed to reach all stakeholders across the collegiate University, available in multiple formats and targeted at specific staff groups. The Code of Practice will be piloted during the 2019 annual progress review where Units of Assessment will be required to apply the Code of Practice, including the UoA Criteria and Working Methods, enabling the REF team to monitor consistency of application across the submission and adapt where necessary.

c. As required by Research England, Equality Impact Assessments of UOA committees will be conducted by the Equality and Diversity Office, ensuring that the processes of staff identification and output selection are in line with the Code of Practice.
Unit of Assessment Committees

11. The University’s submission to REF2021 is developed primarily by Units of Assessment led by UoA Chairs who were appointed following a process of nomination by the Heads of Schools in consultation with the PVC-R.

12. The UoA Chair, supported by the membership of the UoA Committee, will be responsible for the preparation of all aspects of the UoA REF return, including:

   a. the identification of staff to be submitted, including those from Colleges and related institutes
   b. the selection of research outputs
   c. the development and completion of all UoA impact case studies
   d. the review and approval of all REF data provided by the central REF Office such as numbers of PhD students, research income, research income-in-kind and staff employment data
   e. the provision and verification of the accuracy of all elements of the UoA submission.

The final form of the return will be agreed in consultation with the Head of School and the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research.

13. UoA Chairs will, in consultation with the Head of the relevant School and with the approval of the PVC-R, appoint members to the Committee in accordance with the principles as set out in the UoA Criteria and Working Methods (CWM) describing membership, responsibilities and conduct of business.

14. Each UoA Committee must make its Criteria and Working Methods available to all staff. In undertaking their duties, UoA Committees will at all times adhere to their published working methods.

15. UoA Committees are supported in the development of the submission by eight Academic Leads who have been appointed to advise primarily on the impact element of REF2021 and any other element of the relevant UoA submission as appropriate. In addition, the work of the UoA Committees will be supported by the REF Advisory Group, a large group of senior academics with REF experience whose advice may be sought by UoA on an ad hoc basis and many of whom will serve as members of UoA committees.

16. The University will determine the most appropriate UoA to which an eligible staff member is returned. The final decision on any/all matters relating to the assignment of staff to UoA rests with the PVC-R in consultation with the relevant UoA Committee(s) and/or Head(s) of School(s), in order to confirm that all eligible staff submitted have a
substantive connection to the submitting unit as per Research England guidance.

17. The University considers that collective academic judgement must determine the optimal presentation of the University’s research capabilities for REF purposes. There is therefore no expectation beyond the minimum requirements set by Research England of an individual’s contribution to the overall output portfolio of the UoA. Accordingly, no eligible staff member has an inherent right to determine their specific contribution to the UoA submission and, equally, no eligible researcher has the right to refuse to be included in the University’s return.

18. The protection of staff data is paramount and members of UoA Committees must make every effort to prevent unauthorised or accidental access to, or disclosure of, personal information. Research England Guidance on Submissions sets out the personal data that the University must supply in the submission. In the case of University-employed staff, this information will be extracted from the University’s HR and payroll system and held within a secure University REF database to underpin each person’s research output details. In the case of College staff, information will be provided by the Office of Intercollegiate Services and held within the same secure systems.

Part 2: Identifying staff with significant responsibility for research

19. The University of Cambridge will submit 100% of eligible staff across the collegiate University with a significant responsibility for research who are identified as being independent researchers. In the case of University-employed staff, all staff returned to HESA with contractual functions of ‘Teaching and Research’ and ‘Research Only’ will be considered to have significant responsibility. In the case of College-employed staff, those having significant responsibility include all staff identified in the annual college survey or by UoA whose College contracts of employment specify research or teaching and research as their primary function, and they are paid through their College payroll. College Teaching Officers and Research Fellows, who are independent researchers, will be considered for return on the same basis as those paid through the University payroll and will be identified against the comparable HESA class of Teaching and Research or Research Only. Staff who hold joint University/NHS appointments are eligible for inclusion for the FTE for which they are University employees.

20. For staff employed in University posts, where job titles and job descriptions are well understood, are consistent, and reflect clear and specific contractual expectations and responsibility for research, the University has determined that all University Teaching Officers (UTOs) will be automatically assumed to have significant responsibility for research, and to engage actively in independent research. The rationale and justification of any exceptions, which are expected to be extremely limited, are set out in UoA CWM.

21. University employees holding posts of Senior Research Associate or Principal Research Associate and college employees holding the post of Junior or Senior Research Fellow will
normally be considered to have significant responsibility for independent research unless disciplinary norms dictate otherwise. Where any such exceptions apply they will be detailed in the relevant UoA CWM with the justification clearly specified.

22. University employees holding the post Postdoctoral Research Associate and college employees holding the post College Teaching Officers will normally be assessed by UoA committees individually in order to determine significant responsibility for independent research and substantive connection to the UoA in accordance with the UoA Committee Criteria and Working Methods.

23. Each UoA will ensure that the Code of Practice and the UoA CWM are made available to all staff that may be eligible for inclusion in the Unit’s submission to REF2021. These will be published online on the University’s central REF website, on relevant departmental websites, in the Reporter, via central and departmental email lists, and with a letter drawing attention to the consultation to all absent members of staff. Hard copies and accessible copies will also be made available through the Central REF Office, through departmental and School offices (as appropriate and on request).

*Development of Processes*

24. The processes for establishing significant responsibility for research and research independence have been developed with UoA Committees in consultation with staff in the UoA, staff group representatives including the trades unions, postdoctoral societies, the REF Office, and approved by the PVC-R. All policies and procedures adopted in the Code of Practice will demonstrate the principles of transparency, consistency, inclusivity, accountability.

*Part 3: Determining research independence*

*Policies and procedures*

25. For the purposes of REF2021, an independent researcher is defined as an individual who undertakes self-directed research as opposed to solely undertaking research under direction as part of others’ research programmes. The University will use the broad indicators of research independence as published in Research England guidance, augmented as appropriate in the published UoA CWM.

26. Processes for the identification of eligible staff will be undertaken by UoA Committees in accordance with this Code of Practice and the UoA published Criteria and Working Methods. The fundamental principle underpinning each Committee’s work will be that, in accordance with the University’s Equality and Diversity Strategy, no individual identified as eligible for inclusion will receive less favourable treatment than another.
27. Unit of Assessment Criteria and Working Methods have been developed by UoA Committees in consultation with the REF Office, Heads of School, and approved by the PVC-R. The Indicators of research independence applied by all UoA are consistent with the general principles as set out in the REF2021 guidance as follows:

**All Panels**

a. leading or acting as Principal Investigator or equivalent on a significant externally funded research project from a major funder.
b. holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship where research independence is a requirement. A list of fellowships is included as Appendix C.
c. making an exceptional contribution to leading a research group or a substantial or specialised work package.

**Panels C & D supplementary criteria**

d. being named as a Co-I on an externally funded research grant/award.
e. having significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research.

28. In determining UoA specific indicators, UoA Committees recognize that each indicator may not individually demonstrate independence and where appropriate multiple factors may need to be considered. Normally staff who fulfil more than one of the criteria will be considered to be independent researchers unless there is clear justification to the contrary.

29. Preliminary consultation on the principles underlying the processes for staff identification and output selection including the Draft Code of Practice and UoA Committee Criteria and Working Methods will be conducted with the HR Division, Equality and Diversity team, the Office of Intercollegiate Services, individual colleges, staff representative groups during Michaelmas Term 2018 and early Lent Term 2019. Information on the University’s preparations for REF2021 will be shared widely by the Central REF Office in collaboration with Schools and UoA Committees and will take the form of departmental and staff group briefings, website postings, monthly bulletins from the REF Office, discussions with staff group representatives.

30. UoA committees will ensure the fair, consistent and transparent application of the criteria with due consideration of the duty to prevent discrimination, eliminate bias and promote equality. All UoA will follow the procedures below:

a. Lists of Category A eligible staff derived from HESA returns and the College Survey will be supplied to UoA by the REF Office
b. E&D data will be generated from initial lists and held centrally for E&D to conduct Equality Impact Assessment of procedures for staff identification.
c. UoA Committees will review staff lists against the criteria above and in the UoA Criteria and Working Methods.
d. After the Submission Review meetings in the Michaelmas Term 2019, UoA will notify all Teaching and Research and Research Only staff of their eligibility or otherwise, providing the eligibility criteria and an explanation of their right to request that the UoA Committee review its decision.

e. Following a review, the UoA Committee will notify the staff member promptly of the decision and the criteria against which the decision has been taken.

f. The staff member may appeal further and finally to the central REF Appeals Committee as per paragraphs 42-47.

31. UoA Committees will keep auditable records of decisions taken and their justification against the criteria.

32. Online consultation on the Draft Code of Practice will be launched in March 2019 with responses required by end March 2019. The Code of Practice will be published on the REF website, on departmental websites, hard copies will be made available in the University Library; via School and the REF Offices. Notification of the consultation will appear in the University Reporter. The UoA Committees will ensure that absent members of staff are informed individually of the consultation by letter. The final draft will be circulated for approval through the University’s formal governance channels for submission to Research England by the deadline 7 June 2019.

**Staff Circumstances**

33. The University of Cambridge is committed to supporting and promoting equality and diversity in research careers. This commitment is reflected in staff management practices and in all University policies.

34. The REF is not considered by the University to be an assessment of individual staff members. Accordingly, collective academic judgement must determine the optimal presentation of the University’s research capabilities for REF purposes. As such the University supports efforts towards the decoupling of staff and outputs in REF2021. Nonetheless, the University recognizes the effect that individuals’ circumstances may have on research productivity.

35. In accordance with Research England’s REF Guidelines, the process for the voluntary declaration of individual circumstances will be managed by a senior University Committee comprising the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Institutional Affairs), the Director of the HR Division, and the University REF Manager, with the Head of the University’s Equality and Diversity Office in attendance. This Committee will seek professional advice where necessary, and, dependent on the case, may also consult the Head of the School concerned, subject to prior agreement of the member of staff concerned. The Committee will meet as necessary, commencing in the Michaelmas Term 2019, and will be required to meet regularly as necessary. The dates of Committee meetings will be circulated to the Schools, UoA Committee Chairs and posted on the University REF website at least one week in
36. Declaration of individual circumstances will be via the form made available by Research England.

37. It is the University’s view that the individual staff member is best placed to decide whether equality-related circumstances have affected their productivity over the REF period. No member of staff will be placed under pressure to declare their circumstances if they do not wish to do so.

38. The process for declaring staff circumstances will be widely publicised from the Easter term 2019 and will form part of the consultation on the Code of Practice.

39. In all cases, personal information returned to the REF Office will be kept securely and nothing will be released or discussed without the prior consent of the staff member concerned. At the end of the REF audit period, the information will be destroyed or returned, as determined by the individual staff member.

40. It is the University’s view that requests for output reductions for special circumstances, including reduction for ECRs, should be limited to those UoAs where the cumulative effect of any required reduction is greater than 20% of their required output profile.

41. UoA Committees must document how any applied reduction (based on individual circumstances) is reflected in their expectations of the affected researchers’ contribution to the output pool and how this is achieved in the output selection process.

Appeals

42. The following paragraphs document the process by which staff can appeal against a determination by a UoA Committee that they do not meet the criteria to be judged to have significant responsibility for independent research in order to be eligible for inclusion in the REF2021 submission.

43. The processes followed by the University to identify eligible staff for the purposes of REF2021 will be made available to all staff as outlined at paragraphs 19-23. Staff will be informed of decisions relating to their inclusion in a UoA submission by the relevant UoA Committee in accordance with its Criteria and Working Methods.

44. In the first instance, members of staff may request a review of a UoA decision about their eligibility for inclusion in the REF2021 submission according to the review process outlined at paragraph 30.

45. The permissible grounds for appealing a decision reached by a UoA Committee with regards to eligibility for inclusion in the REF2021 include:
a. Where the appellant considers that there has been discrimination against them on the grounds of one or more of the protected characteristics identified in the 2010 Equality Act or on the grounds of their working part-time or being employed on a fixed-term contract, or on other specific unfair grounds;
b. Where it can be demonstrated that a process or procedure detailed in this Code of Practice or UoA Criteria and Working Methods has not been followed correctly and that this has resulted in an unfair outcome;
c. Where a decision by a UoA Committee can be demonstrated to have been taken without the availability of full information that they could reasonably have been expected to take into account in reaching that decision;
d. Where additional information is available and/or specific circumstances have occurred that fall outside the grounds listed above but demonstrate that the decision reached by the UoA Committee is not consistent with the key REF2021 principles of transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity.

46. Any member of research staff will have the right to submit a written appeal (or an appeal in any other format if circumstances make this necessary) on any of the grounds stated in paragraph 45 against a decision of non-inclusion made by a UoA Committee. Appeals, together with any supporting evidence, should be submitted to the central REF Office (REF Manager) within fourteen days of an individual receiving notification of the decision not to include them in the REF submission, unless they are prevented from doing so by illness or any other serious cause. In such cases, the University REF Manager should be alerted, either by e-mail or by telephone (01223).

47. The REF Appeals Committee constituted to hear one or more appeals consists of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research, the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor, the Director of the Human Resources Division, the Head of a School not involved in the decisions appealed against and the Head of the University Research Office. The Head of the University’s Equality and Diversity Office will be in attendance to ensure that all matters are considered in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and the conditions set out in this Code of Practice. The decision of a REF Appeals Committee will be given, in writing, to the Chair of the UoA Committee and to the appellant within fourteen days of the meeting at which the appeal is considered.

48. During all stages of the appeals process, the appellant will have the right to be accompanied by one other person, who may, or may not, be a University staff member. The identity of the accompanying person must be sent to the Chair of the Committee at least one working day before the meeting is scheduled to take place.

Part 4: Selection of outputs

Policies and procedures
49. Each UoA Committee will select outputs for submission in accordance with its published Panel Criteria and Working Methods, which in turn are underpinned by the principle of optimizing the UoA submission by selection based on research quality. Output eligibility for inclusion in REF2021 will be based on Research England published Guidance on Submissions.

50. UoA quality assessments and criteria will be based on criteria and definitions as published by Research England and UoA-level descriptions as listed in UoA CWM.

51. UoA Committees will operate a two-stage process for output selection which will include as the first stage an opportunity for staff to nominate their best outputs and a second stage of peer review by the Committee, advised as required by expert colleagues.
   a. Stage 1: in order to ensure compliance with the principles of equality and diversity, self-nomination of outputs should be conducted by each UoA in the REF Assessment module Symplectic Elements.
   b. Stage 2: UoA Committees may also seek internal or external advice to provide quality assurance of (i) the rigour of the selection process and (ii) that the selection of outputs is consistent with the key principles of transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity.
   c. UoA Committee must detail their review and selection process in their Criteria and Working Methods and the results of the review must be recorded in Symplectic Elements.

Staff, committees and training

52. All processes for staff, committees, training, appeals and EIA are as outlined in Part 2.
Part 5: Appendices

A. Unit of Assessment Criteria and Working Methods
B. Equality Impact Summary Analysis
C. List of eligible fellowships
D. Committee membership