REF 2029
Research Excellence Framework

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is available in Welsh.

Institution name: University of South Wales

Date of submission: 12 May 2026 (pre-panel amendments submitted on the 19 June 2026)

Part 1: Introduction

Scope and definitions

This Code of Practice (CoP) applies to both the University of South Wales (USW) and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD), which are part of the USW Group. USW is a dynamic university, committed to building better futures for its students, communities and partners through impactful research, real world learning and strong industry engagement. RWCMD is the national conservatoire of Wales, providing specialist training in music, drama and related creative disciplines.

It is based on the REF 2029 guidance available at the time of writing. Further guidance, including the main panel criteria and working methods and other documents outlined in the REF 2029 timetable will be published in due course. As such, some aspects of this CoP may be subject to change.

This CoP uses consistent terminology throughout, and for the purpose of this document, references to the 'the University', 'we' or 'our' refer collectively to USW and RWCMD unless otherwise stated.

Institutional Context and Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029

As a post-92 institution, firmly embedded within our region and driven by a strong civic mission, we are proud to contribute our rich and diverse expertise within the communities we serve. These communities value our vocationally focussed education and applied research. Aligning to our Research and Innovation Strategy (R&I) 2030, we collaborate closely with industry and partners to tackle some of the biggest global challenges to provide real-world solutions with meaningful social and economic impact to improve lives and the world around us.

Acknowledging the group structure at USW, our approach to support research is to recognise, respect and honour the differences between the constituent parts of the group. As such, the USW R&I Strategy 2030 (Research and Innovation Strategy 2030 - University of South Wales) outlines the approach taken in USW, and the RWCMD R&I Strategy outlines the approach in the College. Members from both groups attend each other's R&I Committees, and there are representatives from the RWCMD in the USW REF Strategy, REF Working and CoP Task and Finish (T&F) groups. We provide support, guidance and advice across the group for all aspects of R&I activity, including ethics, knowledge transfer and support around impact case studies.

At USW, we value the full breadth of academic expertise and contribution. This is reflected in our four distinct academic promotion pathways – research and development, innovation and engagement, professional practice, and learning and teaching – each of which plays a vital role in delivering the University Strategy 2030. Within this context, a defined proportion of our 'Teaching and Research' (T&R) staff actively engage in research activity and have a significant responsibility for research (SRR), while 'Research-only' (RO) will be recognised as research independent (RI). Accordingly, the contracts of these defined groups of staff have been used to determine the volume of our submissions to REF 2029 (the 'volume measure'), calculated in line with REF 2029 guidance.

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Our CoP has been developed according to the REF 2029 CoP guidance and requirements in the REF 2029 volume measure guidance and the REF 2029 Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU) guidance. All institutions intending to participate in REF 2029 are required to have an approved CoP, ensuring that we are conducting our processes and procedures responsibly and adhering the principles set out by the four UK higher education funding bodies.

How the CoP was developed
Our approach to developing this CoP has been collaborative and inclusive from the outset. We convened a CoP T&F group drawn from across the University, ensuring representation from all four REF 2029 main panels and reflecting the diversity of our research community. The Group's first meeting was framed around equality, diversity and inclusivity (EDI), establishing an inclusive by design approach for the development of the CoP. At each stage, the T&F group tested the proposed criteria with our research structures to ensure that the depth and breadth of our research community is represented. We have addressed the key principles by embedding transparent processes, applying consistent evidence-based criteria, and ensuring fairness and inclusivity across all decisions.

Purpose and principles of the CoP
Our CoP has been developed to meet the four principles set out in Section 8 – Code of Practice guidance – REF 2029, paragraph 1.0.3. It has been designed to be **robust**, with clear, evidence-based criteria and auditable processes for identifying staff with SRR and determining RI. It is **transparent**, providing staff with accessible information, clear communication routes, and full visibility of decision-making structures. It is **equitable and inclusive**, applying institution-wide criteria and standardised procedures through established governance and review mechanisms across the University. Furthermore, this approach is fair, supporting equality, diversity and inclusion by design, informed throughout by Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs), targeted training, and processes that actively safeguard against bias and promote equitable participation.

The criteria used to determine staff with SRR are detailed in Part 2, while the criteria for determining RI are outlined in Part 3. We have built on the approach taken in REF 2021 (REF 2021 Code of practice), specifically how we identify and support staff with SRR, recognising that research commitments extend across REF cycles. To support and nurture research, we introduced Research and Innovation Groups (RIGs) and will align our criteria to those RIGs. https://2021.ref.ac.uk/media/1571/university-of-south-wales_ref2021-code-of-practice.pdf

The REF is a collective effort that draws on the contributions of colleagues across the institutions, and reflects the breadth, depth and quality of the research undertaken. Therefore, this CoP written for all staff, to provide clarity and explain our approach to meeting the amended guidance (between REF 2021 and REF 2029) and the decisions made. It outlines the framework that underpins our REF-related processes, our approach to embedding EDI principles, compliance with legislative requirements, and the rationale for decisions taken.

1. How your CoP supports the principles of:

- **Robustness –** Explain how the policies and processes set out in the CoP ensure that contracts identified as contributing to the volume measure reliably reflect the responsibilities of staff.

Our approach to EDI
Our approach to EDI is integral to the development and delivery of our REF 2029 processes. We are committed to fostering a research environment in which all colleagues the University can participate, develop, and contribute fully regardless of background, personal characteristics or career stage.

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To ensure this, we have embedded EDI considerations from the outset of our REF preparations. This includes integrating EDI expertise into the Code of Practice drafting group, delivering targeted training for colleagues involved in decision-making, and ensuring that every stage of the process is informed by EIA findings.

Our institutional policies, including appraisal guidance, workload allocation frameworks and recruitment processes, are designed to support fair and transparent consideration of staff roles and responsibilities. Workload allocations and decisions relating to SRR and RI are subject to regular equality monitoring to identify and address any disproportionate impacts on protected groups. These processes take account of a range of staff circumstances, including part-time working disability and other factors which may influence research activity over time.

We also recognise the importance of supporting diverse forms of research and diverse career pathways. Through our R&I Strategy 2030, RIG structure, development programmes and leadership initiatives, we provide opportunities for staff at all stages to engage in research, progress their careers, and contribute to our research culture. This includes valuing a broad range of research activities—from disciplinary and interdisciplinary work to practice-based research, applied research, and wider contributions such as leadership and engagement.

Our annual Mock REF exercises and continuous review processes ensure that decisions about outputs are fair, consistent, and based on academic quality. Blind reviewing is used where feasible, and reviewers are supported to mitigate bias.

Overall, our approach ensures that EDI principles are embedded in policy design, decision-making structures and day-to-day implementation, supporting transparency, fairness and inclusivity across all elements of REF 2029.

This is achieved through:

An equality approach: There is mandatory training for all line managers. Our approach builds on our REF 2021 submission, and our R&I and our REF strategy is inclusive by design. Our approach to writing the CoP was the delivery of an EDI briefing at the start of the drafting process, and EDI representation formed part of the writing team.

Contracts and job descriptions: Most of our staff are on agreed grades, with some on personalised salary arrangements. T&R and RO staff have a job description and are on the same grading structure, though newly appointed staff who are on grades D and E are now appointed on Professional and Support Services Limited contracts. All T&R staff are on standard academic contracts, and they also receive a time allocation of 12 ½% for research and scholarly activity (R&SA).

Allocation of time: In USW, when staff have SRR they are normally allocated a minimum 20% dedicated research time within the academic workload model (AWLM), where one exists, for grades F to I. All of this time has to be used for research - postgraduate supervision and the delivery of research funded projects, for example, is additional. Where no AWLM is in place, or for staff above grade I, the allocation of research time is agreed through role profile and/or at appraisal. Associate Professors and Professors can be conferred via any of the four academic career pathways. Their contracts may contribute to the volume measure in REF 2029 but will need to meet criteria for the identification of staff with SRR or RI in Parts 2 and 3.

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Transparent criteria: USW has guidance for appraisals that include the allocation of time for research activities e.g., SRR or R&SA that are discussed at appraisal and interim review. Additional support is provided by the ADRIs. Where training and development needs are identified, we provide a suite of opportunities for development (refer to training and development section below). The guidance offers routes for exploration to ensure staff are sufficiently enabled to use the allocated time to contribute to the University's R&I Strategy 2030. The document is available on the University intranet, Research (SRR) and Research and Scholarly Activity (RSA) DPR Guidance. At RWCMD, staff self-identify as research active and confirm that they meet the criteria for SRR set out in this CoP during individual discussions with line managers and research leads as part of the appraisal process. An external consultant reviews these activities, and SRR decisions are based on these discussions and reviews.

Regular reviews: Workload allocations are reviewed annually although in year adjustments can be made. New starters are also informed of their status regarding SRR or RI and thus, the intention for their contract to contribute to the REF 2029 volume measure is clear from the outset.

Training and review: We support the career development of our researchers and ensure they are valued and supported to deliver on our strategic targets for research. Our R&I Development Programme provides a comprehensive suite of professional training and development opportunities covering a broad range of areas from research methods, research integrity and ethics, funding, and leadership development.

- **Transparency –** Detail how the CoP is communicated to all staff, including those on leave of absence or based outside the UK. Ensure accessibility by providing information in various formats and through appropriate channels. Highlight any additional resources (FAQs, web pages) to support staff understanding. An up-to-date version of the CoP should be published and available externally.

Our approach to CoP design and communication with staff
Our preparations for REF 2029 have been guided by an inclusive and transparent approach. This has included a self-proposal process for outputs, an output review process, and feedback to authors on output reviews. For REF 2029, we have moved to a model of continuous review, informed by our annual 'mock' REF exercises and have introduced guidance on discussing SRR and R&SA within the appraisal process.

The significance of REF to the University is reflected in our annual 'mock' exercise, the outcomes of which are disseminated to our formal committee structures and then our staff. Communication regarding our CoP and REF preparations have been discussed and shared with staff and staff representative groups, including the University College Union (UCU).

A four-week period of staff consultation on the proposed CoP was undertaken from the 17th of March 2026 to the 15th of April 2026. For USW, the draft CoP was published via the University intranet; for RWCMD, the draft CoP was circulated to staff via their usual communication channels. Discussion and approval at key University committees* occurred from a governance perspective, with briefings to University Executive as appropriate.

* The Academic Board, R&I Committee, USW REF 2029 CoP T&F Group, REF Strategy Group, REF Working Group and the RIG Lead Group. There is appropriate representation of RWCMD colleagues on all these committees other than the RIG Lead Group.

Where staff may be on leave of absence, based outside the UK, or other reason for absence, they will be notified by their agreed point of contact within the leadership team.

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Additional guidance in the form of frequently asked questions and communications through our university communication channels will be available throughout the consultation window, although as our RIGs are open to all staff, advice and guidance is always available. Furthermore, each faculty and RIG will host specific REF-related briefings.

As an institution fully supportive of our obligations to the Welsh Language Standards, our approved CoP, and other REF 2029 resources (where required) are provided in Welsh and English. The CoP will be published on the USW research website in both languages. In addition, all approved codes of practice from participating institutions will also be available on the REF 2029 website.

- **Equity and inclusion –** Explain how decisions about submissions are fair and impartial supporting a diversity of people and research, where diverse contributions are valued and supported**.**

Our inclusive approach to R&I
At USW, R&I activity is focussed in four specialised and interdisciplinary Accelerators, integrating expertise from diverse disciplines: Creative Industry , Crime Security and Justice , Health and Wellbeing, and Sustainable Environment. Our 14 RIGs align to the Accelerators and support our core purpose to create a strong and thriving research culture which enables the production of excellent, world-leading and impactful research. The RIGs promote inclusivity and value diversity across disciplines, and our research activity is strategically aligned with our R&I Strategy 2030. Staff are encouraged to join a RIG where they primarily wish to align their research work, where their contributions are recognised and where the career development of our researchers is supported.

The Unit of Assessment (UoAs) that we have decided to submit to are part of the consistent areas of research areas outlined in REF 2014 and REF 2021, although we have had to rationalise UoAs as a consequence of declining student numbers in particular areas (e.g. B10: Mathematical Sciences).

Decisions relating to submissions to REF 2029 are underpinned by the principles of fairness, transparency and inclusivity. As outlined in Part 2, decision-making is overseen by several groups, with final approval on submissions made by the Academic Board. Our CoP set out a clear, evidence-based framework for identifying staff with SRR and determining RI, ensuring consistency and equity across all potential submissions (see Parts 2 and 3). We are committed to fostering an inclusive research culture and environment in which diverse contributions are recognised and valued. This includes acknowledging a full range of research activities, from traditional disciplinary to interdisciplinary research to practice-based or applied research, as well as supporting wider research contributions such as to leadership, impact and engagement. We provide development and training opportunities for staff at all career stages, and support staff to align their research through active participation with our RIGs and their themes. Our approach also reflects our commitment to embedding research into our challenged-based curriculum, reaffirming the integral role of research within the University's identity and mission.

In support of career development, we are signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, hold an Athena Swan Charter bronze award, and Race Equality Charter bronze award, demonstrating our ongoing commitment to EDI. We also invest in developing a skilled and diverse pipeline of research leaders through participation in programmes such as the Welsh Crucible and the Wales Universities Research Leadership Programme, as well as wider personal and professional development opportunities such as the USW Women's Development Programme. We have benefitted from investment by Medr through the Wales Research Environment and Culture Fund, which has strengthened research culture across the

University Group by supporting central activities such as the R&I Conference and PGR Showcase, as well as a range of locally focussed projects through our internal Research Culture Fund. These initiatives support colleagues at all career stages and help to identify and reduce barriers to participation, progression and leadership in research, ensuring all staff can develop and contribute fully to our research environment.

Building on our experience from REF 2014 and REF 2021, we continue to strengthen our processes and procedures through EIAs, training and development programmes for staff, and tailored unconscious bias training in preparation for REF 2029. These measures help ensure that no individual is disadvantaged based on personal characteristics or career-stage. Where EIAs identify disparities, we implement corrective actions and report outcome to appropriate groups within the University.

Our annual 'mock' REF exercise provides a structured opportunity to review and refine our processes, ensuring that opportunities to contribute are open, fair and transparent and representative of the research excellence across the University. As detailed in Part 5, we adopt an inclusive approach to the selection of outputs. Outputs are nominated by staff through a self-selection process and reviewed against the REF 2029 criteria of originality, significance and rigour, with blind reviewing used where feasible. The final output pool is then considered against additional criteria, including best fit for the UoA, compliance with open access (OA) requirements, representativeness, and accounting for the recommended maximum of five outputs per researcher. Our overall approach using self-selection aims to avoid disproportionate dependence on individual researchers and fosters a sense of collegiality.

2. **Contextualisation within Institutional Policies:**
    - Describe how this CoP relates to your institution's context on equality, diversity, and inclusion, PCE and responsible research assessment.

Our approach to inclusive and responsible research practice
This CoP aligns with the University's wider EDI considerations, including the Strategic Equality Plan. It reflects the University's institutional context and demonstrates how our REF 2029 processes align with the University's commitment to EDI, our people, research culture and environment, and responsible research assessment by:

- **Alignment to the University's R&I Strategy 2030,** providing a framework for fostering an inclusive research culture, supporting researcher career development and enabling the production of excellent, world-leading and impactful research.
- **Supporting inclusive participation through our RIGs,** which provide opportunities for staff at USW to engage in research aligned to a wide range of RIG themes, all with established critical mass.
- **Promoting researcher development,** as signatories to the Concordat to support the Career Development of Researchers, through training and development opportunities offered via our R&I Development Programme, and through participation in research leadership programmes such as the Welsh Crucible and the Wales Research Leadership Development Programme.
- **Recognising the full diversity of research contributions,** by adopting an inclusive approach to REF 2029 that enable staff to actively engage within a supportive research culture. We value disciplinary, interdisciplinary, practice-based, and applied research, as well as wider contributions such as research leadership, impact and engagement, ensuring that diverse forms of research excellence are represented in our submissions.

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- **Embedding fairness, transparency and evidence-based decision-making,** building on our REF 2014 and REF 2021 practices, with decisions underpinned by clear criteria, EIAs and training to mitigate bias, ensuring consistency in approach across all our submissions.

- **Ensuring inclusive and rigorous output selection processes,** as outlined in Part 5, so that our staff from underrepresented or protected groups are not disadvantaged.

- **Applying the principles of responsible research assessment,** using peer review to assess output quality and ensuring that journal impact factors, or any other ranking systems to determine the quality of outputs are not used. The University is not a signatory to the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) or the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) as these initiatives don't easily fit into our infrastructure.

Together, these principles will be underpinned through the development of our Research Culture Plan, providing a framework to strengthen our research culture and embed opportunities for researchers at all career stages. This approach fosters an inclusive and equitable environment that supports meaningful contribution to research, diverse forms of excellence, and upholds the principles of responsible research assessment, while valuing career development across our research community.

Support for fixed-term, part-time, and contract research staff
In accordance with Section 8 – Code of Practice guidance – REF 2029, section 13:

'13.1.4. The CoP should include a statement about how the institution supports its fixed-term and part-time staff, including contract research staff, in relation to equality and diversity.'

USW is committed to supporting fixed-term and/or part-time staff, including contract research staff, in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion.

The University seeks to ensure that these staff are treated equitably and have access to the same opportunities, support, and development as staff on permanent contracts. Our preparations for our submission to REF 2029 applies consistent criteria and procedures to all staff with SRR, irrespective of contract type or working pattern. We seek to ensure that staff are not disadvantaged in relation to REF 2029 through fixed-term and/or part-time working, career stage, or other contractual arrangements.

As a signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, the University is committed to creating a positive and inclusive research culture and supporting the development of our researchers. Fixed-term and/or part-time staff including contract research staff have access to the same researcher development opportunities via our R&I Development Programme, training, wellbeing support and institutional initiatives as our staff on permanent and full-time contracts and are encouraged to participate fully in the University's research community. At USW we also make pro-rata adjustments to our academic career progression promotions and apply equitable REF 2029 processes for staff working on fixed-term and/or part-time including contract research staff.

The University monitors equality, diversity and inclusion through our REF preparations via the Mock REF exercises and will continue to review relevant data and processes via our EIA to identify and address any potential barriers affecting fixed-term and/or part-time staff including contract research staff.

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3. **Update on Actions Since REF 2021**:
    - Summarise key actions taken since REF 2021 to address issues or recommendations from previous EIAs.

Building on REF 2021: Progress and developments
Since REF 2021, the University has continued to build on its CoP and embed inclusive practices across research and REF preparations. This section highlights key developments that have been introduced to support staff, foster a positive and equitable research environment, and ensure that REF 2029 reflects the principles of EDI. It demonstrates how the University has learned from previous EIAs and REF experience to maintain fair, transparent and supportive processes for all researchers.

- **Our REF preparations:**
    - We have continued to draw on the principles of fairness, transparency, and EDI in developing our REF 2029 submission. Where appropriate, we have adhered to the REF 2021 CoP while awaiting publication of the REF 2029 guidance and the formal approval of our CoP. This approach has been beneficial in providing continuity and clarity for staff and our reviewers, ensuring that the processes for identifying SRR, RI and preparing our submissions are consistent and understood across the University Group.
    - Consideration of research being embedded across our staff-related processes, including appraisals and recruitment, and our People Plan, ensuring appropriate research representation on key University groups and committees. A suite of research-focussed questions has been incorporated into the annual appraisal framework, supported by guidance on allocating time for research activities.

- **Inclusive staff data analysis:** RWCMD staff data have been integrated in the annual 'mock' REF staff data analysis and subsequent EIAs, supporting full consideration of staff across the USW Group.

- **Alignment with Concordats and researcher development:** We are a signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and adhere to the requirements in the Concordat to Support Research Integrity, ensuring researchers are supported and research is conducted in a compliant and high-quality manner. Professional development is embedded in our R&I Development Programme and leadership initiatives, and in July 2022 we launched the Early Career Researcher (ECR) network, and we are developing on a framework to support mid-career researchers. In January 2026, the University became members of the British Academy ECR Network regional cluster. These efforts foster an inclusive and supportive research culture, enabling staff to contribute fully to our research agenda.

- **Inclusive REF 2029 preparations and EDI:** Inclusive REF preparations have been maintained, with staff continued to be invited to self-propose outputs. Unconscious bias training has been delivered to the REF 2029 CoP T&F Group, with further training planned, demonstrating our ongoing commitment to EDI. USW was also awarded the Race Equality Charter Bronze Award and Athena Swan Bronze award. Our approach builds on our REF 2021 submission, and our R&I and our REF strategy is inclusive by design.

- **Fair approach to output selection:** The self-proposal process ensures that all authors who have made a significant contribution are considered in outputs selection. Outputs in the medium of Welsh are fully included in the EIA process and are treated fairly, with both internal and external reviews conducted in a timely manner, without any delay compared to outputs in English.

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

If all your institution's 'teaching and research' (ACEMPFUN 3) contracts in the HESA staff record already comprehensively identify all staff with significant responsibility for research, simply state this here. No further elaboration is needed in this section.

Context and key changes for REF 2029
REF guidance and criteria evolve with each exercise, and REF 2029 shifts the focus to institutions rather than assessing individuals. This means that the link between staff and outputs has been broken so outputs will be assessed independently of individual staff members. The calculation of the volume measure of each submission has also changed - staff are no longer 'submitted' to REF and there is no REF 2029 census date for staff. Instead, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) staff record data will be used and the volume measure based on the full time equivalent (FTE) of staff contracts with SRR averaged over the REF reporting period – academic year 2025/26 to 2026/27.

Rationale for developing a criteria for SRR
The University's T&R (ACEMPFUN 3) contracts in the HESA staff record do not precisely identify all staff contracts with SRR. To identify all T&R staff contracts with SRR in the REF2029 volume measure calculation would not fairly reflect the diversity of activities undertaken by these staff. Therefore, we have developed a process whereby we can identify all eligible T&R staff contracts with SRR fairly and consistently, in line with the REF 2029 CoP requirements.

For clarity, in REF 2029, eligible contracts are defined in Section 3 – Volume Measure guidance – REF 2029, part 6:

'6.0.1. Eligible contracts are those that fulfil **all** the following criteria:
- **Academic staff:** the contract belongs to an academic staff member whose primary employment function is to undertake either 'teaching and research' (ACEMPFUN 3) or 'research only' (ACEMPFUN 2) activities, as recorded in the HESA Staff record ACEMPFUN field.
- **Payroll and REF period:** the staff member is on the payroll of the submitting institution within the REF period (i.e., academic year 2025-26 to 2026-27 for the relevant HESA Staff record collections).

6.0.2. Two tests determine if an eligible contract qualifies for inclusion in the volume measure.
- **Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR)**: for 'teaching and research' contracts.
- **Research Independence (RI)**: for 'research only' contracts.'

Please refer to Part 3 of this CoP for determining RI of our RO staff.

We acknowledge that in REF 2029, the volume measure is a central aspect of the assessment and reflects the extent of research activities across the institution. It determines the number of outputs and impact case studies required per submission/UoA. For each UoA, the number of outputs is calculated by multiplying the volume measure by 2.5, while the number of impact case studies is determined by volume measure thresholds as set out in Section 6 – Engagement and Impact guidance – REF 2029.

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1. **Policies and Procedures:**
    - **Criteria for SRR**: Clearly define the criteria, based upon job role expectations, not past performance. Consider providing examples for consistent interpretation.

The criteria for identifying staff contracts with SRR was developed for the purpose of REF 2021 and it has become embedded in our institutional processes and procedures. In 2022, the RIGs were launched which align to the University's four strategic and interdisciplinary research areas. Via the RIGs, the R&I Strategy 2030 will be delivered and will also be through which staff contracts with SRR will be confirmed for REF 2029. Therefore, our criteria for identifying staff contracts with SRR have evolved to focus on RIG membership and the aligned RIG themes (for USW not RWCMD staff). This approach will enable the University to maintain an ongoing, verifiable record of staff contracts with SRR through a strategically aligned institutional research structure. We intend to continue to use this approach beyond REF 2029, ensuring consistency and transparency across the institution for the longer-term.

The University recognises that the RWCMD operates within a distinct disciplinary and organisational context, and, therefore, a different approach is used to identify staff with SRR. Whilst the processes differ, both approaches have been designed to apply the REF 2029 definition of SRR consistently and fairly within their respective contexts. The University has considered the equality implications of adopting different approaches and is satisfied that both processes provide an equitable opportunity for staff to be identified as having SRR and to participate in REF 2029. Both approaches are underpinned by the principles of transparency, consistency, inclusivity, and fairness as set out within the CoP.

Agreeing SRR: SRR will be agreed either on appointment to the university or at appraisal. Whilst the approaches differ between USW and RWCMD to reflect their respective institutional and disciplinary contexts, both are designed to identify staff with SRR and provide an equitable opportunity for staff on T&R and RO contracts. For USW the appraisal guidance notes support our line managers in focussed discussions around research and our RIG Leads will input into appraisals in terms of reasonable objective setting. The questions are based on job role expectations, not past performance, with appraisers required to open discussions with "*Please tell me about your SRR/R&SA plans for the year."* At RWCMD, staff self-identify as research active and confirm that they meet the criteria for SRR set out in this CoP during individual discussions with line managers and research leads as part of the appraisal process. An external consultant reviews these activities, and SRR decisions are based on these discussions and reviews.

Ratifying SRR: In either circumstance (new or current member of staff), the allocation of SRR will be conditional on the research being aligned to a RIG theme where the member of staff has been developing their research career. The decision to allocate SRR will be taken in discussion with the line manager and the RIG Lead but will need to be ratified by the Associate Dean for Research and Innovation (ADRI). In both circumstances the RIG application must be completed.

When SRR is agreed and ratified, a minimum time and resource will be allocated - 0.20 FTE (20%) of the contracted time for staff on T&R contracts, pro rata (in proportion to FTE), fully dedicated to research. Agreement of SRR and the associated allocation of time and resource for research is subject to review and discussion, which may lead to changes to decisions on SRR.

The criteria for determining SRR is articulated in table 1 and aligns to the criteria in Section 3 – Volume Measure guidance – REF 2029, section 8.4. REF 2029 definition of SRR:

'8.4.1. 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.'

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Table 1: Criteria for SRR

Explicit time and resource made available for research	If SRR is agreed, staff will be allocated equivalent to 0.20 FTE (20%) of their contracted time, pro rata, fully dedicated to research. All Professors and Associate Professors on a Research and Development route will be allocated equivalent to 0.30 FTE (30%) and 0.20 FTE (20%) respectively of their contracted time, pro-rata, fully dedicated to research. Professors and Associate Professors on a Learning and Teaching, Innovation and Engagement or Professional Practice routes who would normally attract 0.30 FTE (30%) and 0.20 FTE (20%) remission of their contracted time, pro rata, will need to meet the 0.20 FTE (20%) of their contracted time, pro rata, fully dedicated to research.
To actively engage in independent research	The University regards all Professors and Associate Professors on a Research and Development route as independent researchers. The University regards all other staff with SRR as independent researchers.
It is an expectation of the job role	SRR will be agreed if all the below criteria are met at appraisal: • Has a contract type that is T&R and RO. • Leadership or contribution to independent research. • The individual's research activity aligns with the university's agreed UoAs for REF 2029. • That external research funding could be applied for, where opportunities exist. • That supervision of research students (PhD, EdD, MRes or equivalent) is permitted, where opportunities exist. • That the individual is eligible to act as Principal or Co-Principal Investigator. • That the individual is eligible to undertake research without supervision (e.g. has methodological independence). • That the individual is expected to produce research outputs of a quality and type appropriate to the UOAs and to their stage of career.

All T&R staff are required to join a RIG that they primarily wish to align their research work, either as a Member or Enhanced Member (Appendix 1.1). Where SRR is agreed at appraisal, these staff will be required to join as an Enhanced member to receive the minimum time allocation and resource for research as detailed above. Contracts held by staff who have SRR and are on the payroll within the REF reporting period will be included in the volume measure for the UoA(s) to which the contract is assigned. The diagram below gives an outline of the process to identify staff contracts with SRR that are agreed within the REF 2029 period.

An overview of the process to determine SRR at USW is also provided in Figure 1.

Additionally, staff should note:

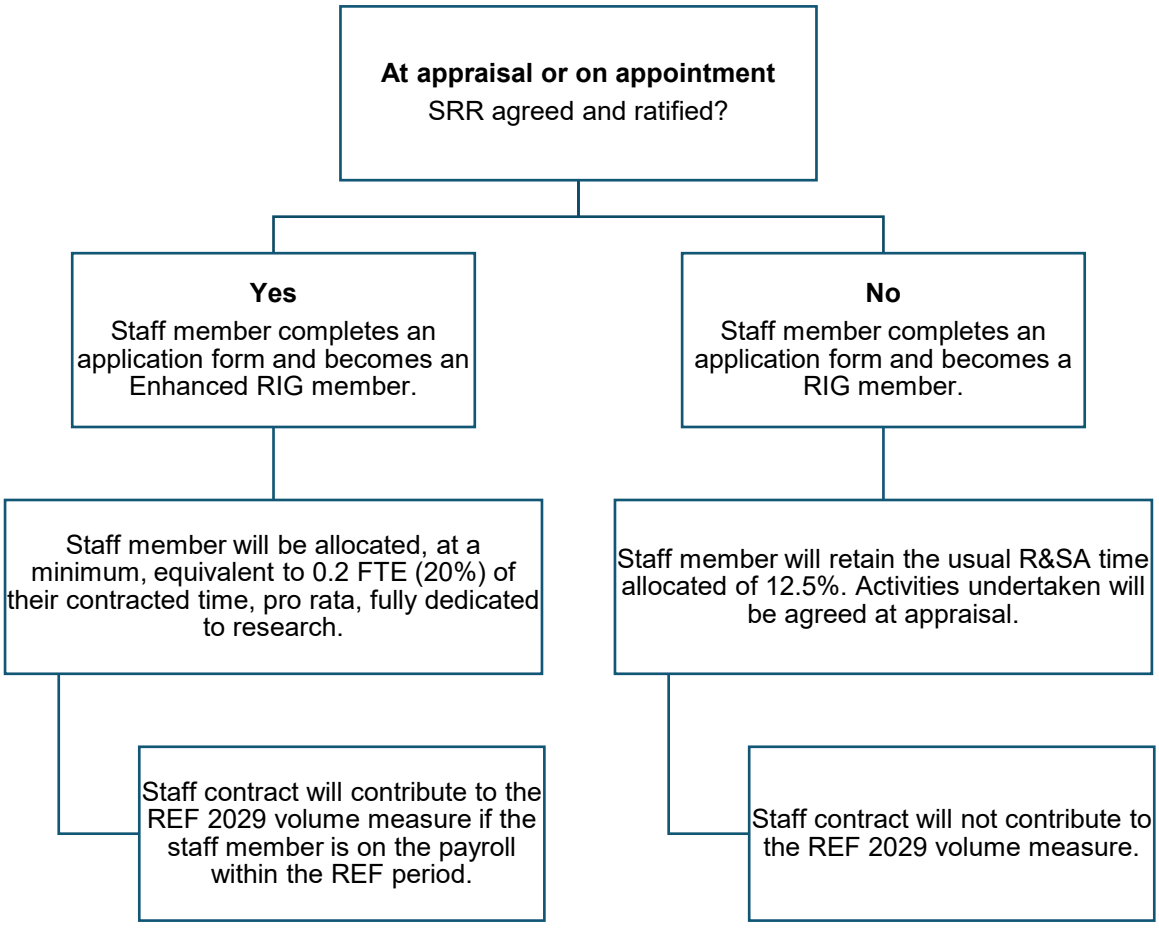
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- As the determination of SRR may change during the REF period, and as staff may join or leave the University during this time, individual contracts may contribute to the volume measure for part, all, or none of the period.

- Staff should note that decisions on SRR will not lead to any changes in staff contracts as a direct result of the implementation of this criteria.

- Discussions around the allocation of SRR can occur outside of the usual timeframes for workload allocation, notwithstanding the need to meet agreed operational commitments that may result in a delay in SRR being allocated.

Figure 1: Overview of the process to determine SRR at USW



Record keeping
People and Organisational Development (OD) and/or Engagement, Research and Commercialisation (ERC) and/or faculties will retain a log of the decisions taken.

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- **Decision-Making and Communication**: Describe the process, roles, and timelines.

The process to identify staff contracts with SRR will be applied consistently and transparently across the institution. USW will embed this approach into established University practice at faculty level for the longer-term i.e., continue with RIGs and the membership criteria beyond REF 2029. RWCMD will also continue with their criteria to determine SRR.

This approach to identifying staff contracts with SRR was approved by University Executive in February 2025. This followed discussions at relevant University Committees and Groups, including the Academic Board, Research and Innovation Committee, USW REF 2029 CoP T&F Group, REF Strategy Group, REF Working Group, Faculty R&I Committees, RWCMD R&I Committee and the RIG Lead Group. Local dissemination and discussion of the CoP also occurred.

The University has consulted with UCU on the CoP and has sought to focus discussions on the identification of staff contracts with SRR and determining RI (Part 3) given the proposal to include the RIGs as a new mechanism to confirm which staff contracts will contribute to the volume measure.

- **Multiple Processes (if applicable)**: If different processes are used for different UoAs, outline each and justify any differences.

We will not use different processes for different UoAs – the same approach will be used for all UoAs.

2. **Staff, Committees, and Training:**

- **Roles and Responsibilities**: Define roles and responsibilities of individuals and committees, distinguishing between advisory and decision-making roles.

The University has a clearly defined governance structure to oversee the preparations for, and submission to REF 2029. This well-established framework has supported previous REF assessments and ensures that decision making is transparent, consistent and is informed by appropriate expertise. Since REF 2014, we have adopted a mock REF approach, with governance arrangements evolving to reflect changes in each assessment cycle. Tables 2 and 3 set out the individuals and committees involved in our REF 2029 preparations, including their roles and ways of working.

The following individuals provide overall leadership and oversight for REF 2029, ensuring strategic alignment and compliance with the CoP:

- **Vice Chancellor (VC)** – provides institutional leadership and formal approval to submit to REF 2029.
- **Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC)-R&I** – provides strategic leadership of REF 2029 preparations.

Our preparations for REF 2029 are also supported by three principal committees:

- **Executive** – provides strategic direction and resources.
- **Academic Board** – provides academic oversight and approval.
- **R&I Committee** – provides academic steer, scrutiny, and recommendation.

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Table 2: Individuals and responsibilities in REF 2029

Individuals	Responsibilities in REF 2029
VC Decision-making	– Formally approves the CoP for submission. – Formally approves the USW Group submission to REF 2029.
PVC-R&I Decision-making	– Implementation of the R&I Strategy 2030 which includes REF 2029 strategic targets. – Develop and implement the REF 2029 code of practice. – Review and recommendations to the Academic Board and the VC for approval to submit to REF 2029. – Chair the following committees: R&I Committee, REF 2029 CoP T&F Group, REF Strategy Group, REF Working Group, RIG Lead Group. – Member of University Academic Board and Executive. – Strategic oversight of the annual Mock REF exercise. – Approval of the appointment of external critical friends. – Arbitrator role if there is a dispute/appeal around SRR or RI and is unresolved at faculty level.
Principal of the RWCMD Decision-making	– Ensure decisions on SRR and RI aligns with RWCMD R&I strategy and REF 2029 plans. – Member of the REF Strategy Group and University Research Committee.
Deans Decision-making	– Ensure decisions on SRR and RI aligns with faculty R&I strategy and REF 2029 plans. – Member of the REF Strategy Group and University Research Committee.
ADRIs Decision-making and advisory	– Delivery of faculty strategic and operational planning and delivery of REF 2029 submissions. – Ratify SRR and RI decisions and ensure criteria are applied consistently. – Oversee HESA staff data alignment in line with the CoP. – Chair of the Faculty R&I Committee. – Member of R&I Committee, REF 2029 CoP T&F Group, REF Strategy Group, REF Working Group and RIG Lead Group.
REF Leads Decision-making and advisory	– Lead the development of all elements of the UoA submission including management of the internal and external of output review process. – Make recommendations on output selection in line with the principles of the CoP, ensuring consistency and defensibility of academic judgements. – Support clear communication with staff regarding REF process and criteria. – Member of the REF Working Group and Faculty R&I Committee.
ERC (Deputy Director, Head of Research Environment, Researcher	– Lead the delivery of the annual Mock REF exercises and maintain supporting systems and processes.

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Development Manager, Impact Manager) Advisory	– Provide specialist strategic and operational advice to the PVC-R&I and work closely with the REF Leads to co-ordinate the preparation of submissions. – Oversee the implementation and operational delivery of the CoP, where appropriate, ensuring compliance, documentation, and audit readiness. – Coordinate REF-related data management, working with our other Professional Services teams to ensure accuracy and consistency of staff and output data. – Support and membership of the following committees: R&I Committee, REF 2029 CoP T&F Group, REF Strategy Group, REF Working Group, RIG Lead Group.
Research Librarian Advisory	– Advise on REF OA policy requirements and provide relevant training opportunities for staff. – Monitor the deposit of outputs in Pure and the institutional repository to ensure eligibility. – Oversee compliance with REF OA timelines and requirements. – Maintain appropriate documentation and evidence for audit purposes. – Produce compliance reports, flag at-risk outputs or areas of concern. – Member of the REF Working Group and attendance at the R&I Committee for reporting purposes.
People and OD (People and OD Partner, People Systems, Data and Insights Manager, Data Analyst) Advisory	– Support institutional REF planning and related processes. – Coordinate with Faculties, Departments and ERC to validate staff data for the HESA staff record aligning with the principles of the CoP. – Ensure procedures for collecting staff data are robust, consistent and auditable. – Produce staff data reports and maintain the REF dashboard. – Provide data analysis to support EIAs. – Advise on HR policies to inform the development and implementation of the CoP.
University Secretary's Office (EDI Manager and EDI Advisor) Advisory	– Provide specialist guidance on embedding EDI within REF processes. – Develops and delivers appropriate training for REF-related groups and decision-makers. – Supports EIAs and helps the institution meet the principles in the CoP.
Communications Manager Advisory	– Develop and deliver communications to staff on relevant REF related information, timelines and processes. – Ensure messaging around the CoP is clear and accessible, coordinating updates via the intranet, website and other channels as appropriate. – Develop and deliver a communications strategy for the outcomes of REF 2029.

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REF Lead appointments

REF Lead appointments are made outside the University's standard recruitment process, through an open, transparent, and consistent internal appointment process. They are specialist time-limited roles reflecting the specialisms of the nature of research in each submission we are developing for REF 2029.

The criteria, role description and terms of appointment are the same for all our REF Leads. The process of appointment is as follows:

- Normally, a call for expressions of interest is shared with faculty staff, as appropriate.
- Applications are received by ERC and are shortlisted by the PVC-R&I and ADRI(s) with those meeting the criteria invited for interview.
- The interview panel consists of the PVC-R&I, Dean/ADRI and another senior colleague with knowledge of REF.
- Appointments are ratified by the REF Strategy Group.

Table 3: Committees and decision-making roles

In this table, the committees are described from a REF perspective, even where they are part of the wider University committee structure. Note, the RWCMD is represented on all REF groups. To note that support and engagement opportunities across our committee structure, where appropriate, extends across career stages.

Group/Committee	Responsibilities in REF 2029
Executive Role: Decision-making Level: Central USW Chair: VC Record-keeping: Notes	– Provide strategic leadership and ensure REF preparations align with institutional strategy and financial planning. – Monitor strategic risks relating to REF 2029. – Approve to submit to REF 2029 for each UOA, and the institutional-level Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE) Statement. – Approval to submit the USW Group REF 2029 CoP.
Academic Board Role: Decision-making Level: Central USW Chair: VC Record-keeping: Minutes	– Provides academic oversight of the REF 2029 submission and ensure it aligns with academic standards and institutional strategy. – Approval of key elements of the submission, where required. – Receives recommendations on REF 2029 submissions for approval from R&I Committee and/or its sub-committees. – Receive assurance that preparations for REF 2029 are robust, fair and transparent adhering to the principles of the CoP.
R&I Committee Role: Advisory Level: Central USW Chair: PVC-R&I Record-keeping: Minutes Sub-Committee of: Academic Board	– To develop, implement and review the R&I Strategy 2030 for the University to support the 2030 University Strategy which includes REF-related targets. – Scrutinise progress prior to recommendations to Academic Board. – Make recommendations to Academic Board regarding our REF 2029 submission. – Ensure implementation of the approved CoP.
RWCMD R&I Committee Role: Advisory Level: RWCMD Chair: Principal	– Coordinate and oversee the College's submission to REF 2029, working closely with the University R&I Committee and relevant support departments.

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Record-keeping: Minutes Sub-Committee of: R&I Committee	– Advise the Principal and the College Academic Board on research strategy, funding and initiatives to strengthen the College's submission to REF. – Support the development and quality of all elements of the College's REF 2029 submission.
Faculty R&I Committees Role: Advisory Level: Faculty USW Chair: ADRI Record-keeping: Minutes Sub-Committee of: R&I Committee	– Monitor faculty research performance and environment to support REF 2029 submissions and quality. – Advise the Dean and University R&I Committee on Faculty REF strategy and performance. – Promote adherence to the CoP and support staff development to strengthen REF 2029 submissions.
REF Strategy Group Role: Decision-making and advisory Level: Central USW Chair: PVC-R&I Record-keeping: Minutes Sub-Committee of: R&I Committee	– Provide strategic oversight of REF planning and progress. – Make key decisions on UoAs and REF Lead appointments and recommend final submissions to Executive. – Oversee EIAs and ensure institutional responses to REF consultations. – Monitor REF performance, including Mock REF outcomes and financial planning.
REF 2029 Working Group Role: Advisory Level: Central USW Chair: PVC-R&I Record-keeping: notes Sub-Committee of: R&I Committee	– Develop and oversee processes to optimise the REF 2020 submission. – Foster a supportive REF community. – Oversee internal review processes and share intelligence to strengthen submissions and narrative elements. – Ensure practices comply with the CoP and promote EDI.
REF 2029 CoP T&F Group Role: Advisory Level: Central USW Chair: PVC-R&I Record-keeping: Notes Sub-Committee of: Independent	– Devise the core principles for the CoP. – Propose criteria for SRR and RI, including additional time for research and performance requirements. – Identify interdependencies with other work programmes, such as HESA returns, strategic planning and performance review. – Prepare a draft CoP for scrutiny from staff representative groups, and all-staff consultation, Executive, Academic Board, and other relevant committees.

- **Training**: Detail training provided.

EDI training has been provided for staff involved in supporting REF 2029 submissions to ensure that decisions are fair, consistent and free from bias. Training supports a shared understanding of EDI principles, the potential for bias, and the need to recognise diverse research contributions and career pathways. This helps to ensure that judgements relating to staff and outputs do not discriminate against individuals with protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010, and other underrepresented groups.

The University ensure that steps are taken to deliver appropriate training to groups and individuals who make decisions on our REF submissions. Through discussions with the EDI team, we propose different approaches

to EDI training, specifically focussed on bias related to REF 2029, and will deliver the following training for line managers and staff involved in REF decision-making and selection.

Training for line managers
All line managers undertaking appraisals are requested to undertake the University's mandatory EDI training courses and there is an expectation that they will undertake sessions that are provided. This is designed to strengthen understanding, confidence and inclusive practice across the University. It includes mandatory online courses and a series of face-to-face workshops. These opportunities contribute to the University's commitment fostering an inclusive, equitable and respectful environment for all colleagues and students, in line with USW's Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028.

These training requirements include:

Mandatory online training

- Introduction to Equality Legislation in Higher Education

This is a sector-specific course that provides an engaging introduction to the Equality Act 2010, exploring colleagues' responsibilities and the duty we all share to promote equality and diversity at the University.

- Advance HE: Introduction to Race Equity

Developed by Advance HE, this course supports colleagues in thinking critically about race, racism, and inequity in higher education, and supports the University's ongoing commitment to the Race Equality Charter.

Face-to-face workshops

- Anti-bias
- Anti-racism
- Social model of disability and reasonable adjustments
- Neurodivergence awareness

Training for individuals or groups supporting REF 2029 preparations
The University will provide EDI training with a REF-specific focus to staff involved in REF 2029 decision-making and selection. This training will cover REF-related EDI considerations, including the identification of staff with SRR and determining RI, output selection and allocation. Training will also address the potential for bias and the importance of fair, transparent and evidence-based decision-making.

The following individual staff or groups will be required to undertake this training:

- PVC-R&I
- REF Leads
- ADRIs
- Professional Services staff involved in REF preparations
- Members of the REF Strategy Group who are not listed above
- Members of the REF Working Group who are not listed above
- Members of the CoP T&F Group (see below)

Members of the REF CoP T&F group received EDI training at the outset ensuring that ensuring EDI considerations informed the design and development of the CoP. The EDI team delivered two workshops:

Workshop 1: Equity Impacts – REF 2029 CoP

Aims:

- To enhance decision-making by increasing awareness of EDI principles and common biases.

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- To foster an inclusive approach to REF 2029 Code of Practice
- To equip participants with the skills to recognize and mitigate bias in the workplace.

Objectives:

- Engage in interactive discussions to explore the difference between equality, equity, diversity, inclusion, and the impact of biases.
- Address real-life concerns shared by colleagues to understand practical challenges in decision making.
- Identify and discuss actionable mitigations to minimize bias and promote inclusivity.

Workshop 2: Equity by Design – Equality Impact Assessments

Aims:

- **What** an EIA is.
- **Why** EIAs are essential practice for USW, including understanding the difference between equality, equity and diversity, and the protected characteristics.
- **Which** activities need EIAs.
- **When** to carry out an EIA.
- **Who** is responsible for doing an EIA.
- **How** to do an EIA – for REF 2029 Code of Practice.

It is intended that this training or a combination of the two workshops will be delivered as training for individuals or groups supporting REF 2029 preparations during 2026.

3. **Appeals:**
    - Clearly outline how staff can appeal decisions about SRR, with appropriate links and contact details.

The approach to REF 2029 is based on agreed contract types. Therefore, there will not be a separate REF appeals process, and staff will follow the University's existing appeals process. One of the grounds for appeal is for staff who believe their contract type is incorrectly assigned.

The University will not establish a separate REF-specific appeals process, as decisions relating to the identification of staff contracts with SRR, determining RI (Part 3), allocating staff to UoAs (Part 4) and the selection of outputs (Part 5) are embedded within faculty processes and procedures. Where a staff member disagrees with a decision, they would be advised to raise this with their ADRI and/or Dean/College Principal. If the matter remains unsolved, the PVC-R&I will act as final arbitrator.

Grounds for appeal

1. Contract type has been incorrectly assigned.
2. The criteria for the allocation of SRR was not applied in accordance with the CoP.
3. Data underpinning the decision on SRR was inaccurate at the time of the discussion.
4. That they did not receive the agreed allocation of time dedicated to research (for new appointments).

The following reasons are **not** valid grounds for appeal:

1. Based on academic judgement of the data available to determine SRR.
2. Inclusion of their contract in the volume measure for REF via the HESA staff data.

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3. On the criteria to identify staff contracts with SRR or any other aspect of the REF 2029 criteria.
4. The allocation of workload or objectives set in relation to the REF process.
5. The UoA alignment of the staff contract with SRR where there is not an agreed UoA submission.
6. Their programme of research is not aligned to the RIG or R&I Strategy 2030.
7. The selection of outputs and substantive link.

4. **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**:
    - **EIA Integration**: Demonstrate how EIA informed SRR identification and policy/procedure development. Provide information on data, findings, and actions taken.

EIAs are integral to the development and implementation of this CoP and to the University's approach to our REF 2029 preparations. EIAs are used to assess the potential impact of policies, procedures and decisions on individuals with protected characteristics and other underrepresented groups, and to identify mitigating actions where required.

For REF 2029, **a combined EIA** has been undertaken to inform the development of processes and procedures relating to Parts 2 to 5, namely:

- Identification of staff contracts with SRR (Part 2)
- Determining RI (Part 3)
- Allocating contracts to UoAs (Part 4)
- Selecting outputs (Part 5)

The EIA findings, together with lessons learned from REF 2021 (see Part 1, section 3. Update on actions since REF 2021), have informed the design of policies and procedures described in this CoP. They have also helped to ensure that our approach to REF 2029 is fair, transparent, and inclusive, and that potential equality impacts have been considered across the various aspects of our REF 2029 preparations.

The EIA undertaken for REF 2029 combines the analysis of staff contracts with SRR and staff determined as RI noting that RO staff reflects a relatively smaller number of RO staff at the USW, and the fact that RWCMD does not have any RO staff. Combining these groups enabled the analysis of the equality data for staff eligible to contribute to the volume measure. The EIA also considers the potential impacts of our processes and procedures relating to allocating contracts to UoAs and selecting outputs.

Data used in the EIA
The data used in the EIA were:

- Equality monitoring data held by the University (for T&R and RO staff).
- Data from the annual Mock REF exercises (2023,2024, and 2025) (staff with SRR and RI).
- Outcomes of equality analysis for each protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.
- Analysis of staff working patterns (full-time and part-time).
- Outcomes of equality analysis for combined protected characteristics (intersectionality data).
- Comparisons with REF 2021.
- External evidence from across the sector.

Findings from the EIA
Overall, participation in the Mock REF exercises broadly reflected the profile of the University's staff population, although some differences were observed:

- Female staff were somewhat underrepresented within the Mock REF core group compared with the whole population, although the difference reduced across the three Mock REF exercises.
- Disabled staff were also slightly underrepresented within the Mock REF core group compared with the whole group, although the difference reduced across the three Mock REF exercises.
- Staff identifying as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) were slightly more represented within the Mock REF core group compared with the whole group.
- Data on age showed that mid-career staff were strongly represented in the Mock REF core group, while some younger age groups were slightly less represented compared to the whole population, which may be due to differences in career stage and time taken to establish a research profile.
- For other protected characteristics, including gender identity, and pregnancy and maternity, the data available was limited due to small numbers (and thus redacted from the dataset) or a high proportion of responses recorded as 'information not provided', which limited analysis and subsequent conclusions.
- Intersectional analysis did not identify evidence of disproportionate impacts associated with the University's preparations for REF 2029 via the annual Mock REF exercises.

How the EIA informed processes and procedures
Processes and procedures were developed as follows, for each part of the CoP:

- **Identification of staff with SRR (Part 2):** the identification of staff with SRR is based on job role expectation, rather than individual characteristics. The University's approach to identifying staff with SRR is embedded in existing University processes and procedures linked to annual and mid-term appraisals and the allocation of a minimum time and resources dedicated to research, and for USW, aligned to RIG membership and RIG themes. This approach ensures that expectations relating to research are clear and consistent.
- **Determining RI (Part 3):** determining RI for RO staff at USW is based on role responsibility and evidence of independence grade, using a more consistent approach than in REF 2021. This approach ensures that the contributions of RO staff are valued equally to T&R staff and ensures transparency, consistency, and that RI remains persistent. Our approach also ensures that RO staff are not disadvantaged in the REF process based on protected characteristics.
- **Allocating contracts to UoAs (Part 4):** we have a consistent and transparent approach to allocating staff contracts to UoAs which is based on alignment with HESA cost centres and RIG themes, where appropriate. This approach supports the fair representation of research activity across the University.
- **Selecting outputs (Part 5):** the EIA has supported the continued development of the University's approach to selecting outputs, building on the self-selection process used in the annual Mock REF exercises. This is an inclusive approach which enables staff to propose outputs for review. Our approach to the mechanism for establishing a substantive link between the output and the University through an eligible employment relationship has been developed, including the approach to submitting outputs from former members of staff. Furthermore, the CoP and EIA confirm that our approach to allocating outputs to UoAs including multiple UoAs is fair and transparent and aligned with REF 2029 guidance.

Actions
The findings of the EIA support several mitigations designed to support fairness and inclusivity in our preparations for submission to REF 2029. The mitigations arise both from the REF 2029 guidance and from the University's processes and procedures and support a fair, transparent and inclusive approach to our REF 2029 preparations:

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- **REF 2029:** includes several key changes for REF 2029 intended to support the shift from away from the assessment of individuals and reduce potential disadvantage. These include breaking the link between staff and outputs/decoupling, the removal of the minimum of one output, and a recommended maximum of five outputs per substantive link. Staff are also no longer 'submitted' to REF but instead the contracts of staff with SRR and RI will contribute to the volume measure via the HESA staff record data. These key changes for REF 2029 reduce the reliance on individuals and support a more equitable approach to assessing research activity.
- **University processes and procedures:** the University has implemented several processes and procedures designed to support fairness and transparency in our preparations for submission to REF 2029. These include:
    - Equality monitoring of Mock REF core staff and the whole staff population of those on T&R and RO contracts.
    - Clear and consistent University criteria for the identification of SRR and RI, embedded in our university processes and procedures.
    - The annual Mock REF exercises enabling staff to self-propose outputs.
    - Internal and external peer review of outputs.
    - Consistent and transparent approach to the allocation of contracts to UoAs using HESA cost centres and RIG themes, where appropriate.
    - Recognition of interdisciplinary work through a clear approach to allocating outputs to multiple UoAs.

Publication
The EIA is submitted to REF alongside the CoP. We will also publish the final EIA, including outcomes of actions taken. The EIA will inform the funding bodies and the REF 2029 People, and Diversity Advisory Panel (PDAP) in evaluating the effectiveness of the REF 2029 EDI arrangements and identifying lessons for future exercises. PDAP will not undertake a formal review of individual institution's EIAs.

Ongoing monitoring and review
Where the EIA identifies significant variances or potential disproportionate impacts on individuals with protected characteristics or other underrepresented groups, these findings will inform adjustments to our relevant REF 2029 processes and procedures.

Ongoing monitoring of data from the University's Mock REF exercises will inform the continued development of the EIAs. Thus, the EIA will be updated iteratively, informed by the annual Mock REF exercises and ongoing monitoring throughout REF 2029.This monitoring will help ensure that our preparations for REF 2029 are undertaken in line with the CoP and will enable the University to identify and address any differences in representation between the Mock REF core group and the whole staff population. The findings will also inform the University's final preparations prior to submission in 2028. This monitoring will include analysis of participation by key characteristics such as sex and working pattern, using data from the Mock REF exercises to assess representation within the REF 2029 process.

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Part 3: Determining Research Independence

(Required for all participating institutions)

1. **Policies and Procedures**:
    - **Criteria and Evidence**: Clearly outline criteria and evidence used to assess research independence, particularly for 'research only' (ACEMPFUN 2) contracts.

Context and key changes for REF 2029
The criteria for identifying staff contracts with RI applies to our staff who are on RO contracts. For the purposes of REF 2029, RI is expected to be persistent rather than temporary or incidental. Individuals determined as RI will be those independently leading their research on an on-going basis, rather than for a short period or for one specific piece of work:

In Section 3 – Volume Measure guidance, paragraph 9.1.3., the definition of RI for REF 2029 is:
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.

This determination will be made in line with the criteria below, ensuring consistency, transparency and alignment with the principles of the CoP.

Criteria for identifying staff contracts with RI
In REF 2021, we determined RI for our RO staff using role responsibility and evidence of independence based on indicators set by the REF 2021 main panels, with some variation across disciplines. For REF 2029, we will adopt a similar process, with greater consistency and an evolved focus on RIG membership and the aligned RIG themes as described in Part 2. This approach ensures that the contributions of RO staff are valued equally to T&R staff and allows the University to maintain an ongoing, verifiable record of RO staff determined as RI. Embedding this approach within the institutional research structure further ensures transparency, consistency, and that RI remains persistent.

Tables 3 and 4 provide further detail on how RI is determined. Table 4 outlines the role responsibilities considered, while table 5 summarises the types of evidence used to demonstrate RI. Together, they show how the University applies these criteria consistently across all eligible RO staff.

Note that the RWCMD does not have eligible RO staff, so this section refers to RO staff at USW only.

Table 4: Role responsibility of RO staff

Grade	Role Responsibility	Determined as RI?
D	Normally a research assistant and whose job purpose is to undertake supervised research projects and provide support for researchers.	Staff with this role responsibility are **not** considered independent researchers. The contract will not contribute to the volume measure for REF 2029.
E	Normally a senior research assistant whose job purpose is to	Staff with this role responsibility may be considered independent researchers and would be determined on a case-by-case basis.

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	undertake and contribute to research activity.	If the role is determined as research independent the contract will contribute to the volume measure, and research independence will be considered persistent.
F	Normally a research fellow whose job purpose is to undertake and where appropriate lead research projects.	Staff with this role responsibility may be considered independent researchers and would be determined on a case-by-case basis. If the role is determined as research independent the contract will contribute to the volume measure, and research independence will be considered persistent.
G	Normally a senior research fellow whose job purpose is to lead and manage research projects.	**Is** determined an independent researcher. The contract will contribute to the volume measure, and research independence will be considered persistent.

Table 5 Evidence of RI

Where RI is determined on a case-by-case basis (for grades E and F), we have considered the REF 2029 indicators in Section 3 - Volume Measure guidance, paragraph 9.2.1. and applied our own University-specific criteria as a basis for the decision.

Evidence of RI	Contracts typically considered to exhibit RI are those where staff members: – Principal Investigator (PI)/Co-PI or lead applicant/co-applicant on funded research projects. – Hold an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship requiring research independence*. – Lead a research group or a substantial/specialised work package. – Where research independence is an inherent expectation of a contract. – Publishes outputs that emerge from their own independent research, including sole- or lead-authored work under from their own name. * eligible research fellowships
Minimum evidence required	The University expects that decisions on determining RI will be based on meeting **two or more** of the indicators of evidence of independence.
Limitations of outputs as evidence of RI	We do not expect RO staff being considered for RI to meet all the indicators of evidence of independence. However, outputs alone are not sufficient evidence of RI. In accordance with Section 3 - Volume Measure guidance, section 9: '9.6.1. Being named on research outputs alone does not necessarily qualify a contract for inclusion.'

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Applying the criteria to determine RI
RI will be agreed at appraisal or on appointment to the University. Where RI is considered on a case-by-case basis, the indicators set out in Table 4 will be reviewed at appraisal and RI determined where appropriate.

After a determination has been made, all RO staff will follow the same process for RIG membership as detailed in Part 2*. This approach ensures integration into Faculty processes and procedures, replacing the separate arrangements used in REF 2021.

* Note that for RO staff, they may not need to make the following Enhanced RIG membership criteria in Table 1: That supervision of research students (PhD, EdD, MRes or equivalent) is permitted, where opportunities exist.

When RI has been determined, their independence is now persistent. It is only in exceptional cases that RI will be removed such as the nature of their contract has changed or they change their contract – this is in accordance with Section 3 - Volume Measure guidance, section 9.3. RI can be determined at any point in the REF cycle and not solely within the REF 2029 reporting period. RO staff that were determined as an independent researcher for REF 2021 will retain their independence in REF 2029.

The contracts of RO staff who are RI and on the payroll within the REF period will contribute to the volume measure. Those not determined to have RI will not. The determination of RI may change during the REF period, and as staff may join or leave the University during this time, individual contracts may contribute to the volume measure for part, all, or none of the period.

Staff should note that determinations on RI will not lead to any changes in staff contracts as a direct result of the implementation of this criteria
.

- **Decision-Making and Communication**: Describe the process, roles, and timelines.

Please see Part 3, section 1.

2. **Staff, Committees, and Training:**
   - *If this section is the same as Part 2, please just refer to the earlier text.*
   - **Roles and Responsibilities**: Define roles and responsibilities of individuals and committees, distinguishing between advisory and decision-making roles.
   - **Training**: Detail training provided.

Please see Part 3, section 2.

3. **Appeals:**
   - Clearly outline how staff can appeal decisions about research independence, with appropriate links and contact details.

As also stated in Part 2. Appeals, the approach to REF 2029 is based on agreed contract types. Therefore, there will not be a separate REF appeals process, and staff will follow the University's existing appeals process. One of the grounds for appeal is for staff who believe their contract type is incorrectly assigned.

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The University will not establish a separate REF-specific appeals process, as decisions relating to the identification of staff contracts with SRR (Part 2), determining RI, allocating staff to UoAs (Part 4) and the selection of outputs (Part 5) are embedded within faculty processes and procedures. Where a staff member disagrees with a decision, they would be advised to raise this with their ADRI and/or Dean. If the matter remains unsolved, the PVC-R&I will act as final arbitrator.

Grounds for appeal

1. Contract type has been incorrectly assigned.
2. The criteria for determining RI were not applied in accordance with the CoP.
3. Misinterpretation of the indicators of evidence used to determine RI.
4. Data underpinning the decision on RI was inaccurate at the time of the discussion.

The following reasons are **not** valid grounds for appeal:

1. Based on academic judgement of the data available to determine RI.
2. Inclusion of their contract in the volume measure for REF via the HESA staff data.
3. On the criteria to determine RI or any other aspect of the REF 2029 criteria.
4. The UoA alignment of the RI determined staff contract where there is not an agreed UOA submission.
5. Their programme of research is not aligned to the RIG or R&I Strategy 2030.
6. The selection of outputs and substantive link.

4. **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**:
    - **EIA Integration**: Demonstrate how EIA informed research independence determination and policy/procedure development. Provide information on data, findings, and actions taken.

Equality considerations relating to this part of the CoP are addressed through the combined EIA described in Part 2, section 4. The full EIA will be published separately alongside the CoP.

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Part 4: Allocating Contracts to UoAs

(Required for all participating institutions)

1. **Policies and Procedures**:
    - **Criteria and Evidence**: Clearly outline criteria and evidence used to allocate contracts to UoAs

Context and key changes for REF 2029
We have allocated all our T&R and RO staff to HESA cost centres and UOAs in the 2024/25 HESA staff record, recognising that the HESA data will be the sole source for calculating the REF 2029 volume measure. All contracts eligible for REF 2029 must, therefore, be allocated to a UoA with which it is principally associated in the HESA staff record.

Although UoA data was collected for all eligible staff in previous assessments, it was not mapped annually. For REF 2029 institutions are required to record UoA alignment in the HESA staff record data each year to ensure accuracy, track trends over time, and provide a verifiable basis for the volume measure. The REF 2029 volume measure will be calculated using data from two reporting years, 2025-26 and 2026-27. Data from these two reporting years will be averaged to determine the volume measure for each UoA, reflecting changes in staff over time, rather than relying on a single census date.

HESA requires institutions to allocate all T&R and RO contracts to a UoA. The UK higher education funding bodies will use this data to cross-check against HESA cost centres. To ensure compliance and accurately calculate the REF 2029 volume measure, the following contracts will be allocated to UoAs in the HESA staff data record from 2025/26 onwards:

- T&R staff contracts identified as SRR and contracts of RO staff determined as RI.
- T&R staff contracts not identified as SRR and contracts of RO staff not determined as RI.

For the avoidance of doubt, all T&R and RO contracts will be allocated to an appropriate UoA within the HESA staff record, irrespective of whether the contract will contribute to the volume measure. The allocation of a contract to a UoA is a requirement for the HESA staff record and should not be interpreted as confirmation that the contract has SRR, RI, or will contribute to a REF 2029 submission.

The following criteria from Section 3 – Volume Measure guidance – REF 2029, section 12, also apply :

- Where more than one contract is attributable to an individual, each contract may be returned to a different UoA.(12.2.1.)
- UoA allocation may change between annual returns, reflecting the evolving nature of research and substantive connections. (12.3.1.)

Criteria for allocating contracts to UoAs
For RWCMD contracts will be allocated only to UoA D33: Music Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies.

For USW, we will apply a consistent and logical approach to the allocation of contracts to UoAs and will:

1. Ensure alignment with HESA cost centre wherever possible.
2. Use the RIG and RIG themes as an overarching guide to the UoA allocations.

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3. Allocate staff contracts identified as SRR and RI only to UoAs where we intend to submit, reflecting our strategic priorities.
4. Allocate T&R and RO staff contracts not determined as SRR, and RO contracts not determined as RI to UoAs where no REF 2029 submission is planned, reflecting disciplinary and/or pedagogic activity. Where appropriate, this may include UoAs in which the University does not intend to make a REF 2029 submission*.

*Examples include aligning staff with UoA 23: Education, where staff are engaged in pedagogic practice but do not have SRR or are RI but is a genuine reflection of their scholarly interests. Staff should not be of the assumption that alignment to a UoA is a commitment to developing or maintaining a submission in subsequent REF exercises.

As detailed in Part 2 and 3, only staff contracts with SRR and contacts of RO staff determined as RI will contribute to the REF 2029 volume measure.

- **Decision-Making and Communication**: Describe the process, roles, and timelines.

The allocation of eligible staff to UoAs will be conducted as part of our established processes for collecting HESA staff record data. Faculties, RWCMD and departments will be asked to confirm UoA allocation in accordance with the criteria outlined above.

For decisions involving eligible staff in departments outside faculties, UoA allocations will be determined by the PVC-R&I in consultation with the relevant Director, where appropriate. ERC will also review the allocations, checking them against our REF 2029 Mock REF data and advising faculties on any data anomalies in line with the CoP and REF 2029 guidance.

Cost codes will be considered with UoA allocations and verified by faculties, recognising that some may have multiple skill sets or undertake interdisciplinary research. Table 6 shows the timelines for the allocating contracts to UoAs, based on HESA staff data collated in 2026 and 2027 for the two REF reporting periods.

Table 6: Timelines for allocating contracts to UoAs

Month	Activity undertaken to allocate contracts to UoAs
July	HESA data for review is provided by People and OD.
July to August	Faculties, RWCMD and departments outside faculties to confirm UoA allocations during July to August.
September	ERC review allocations against Mock REF data during August to November.
October	Final UoA allocations in the HESA staff record will be completed by November.
November	Submission of HESA staff data record including UoA allocations
April to May	Interim review of HESA staff data including SRR, RI and UoA allocations as part of the Mock REF analysis.
Ongoing	Live overview of our staff profile available via the institutional REF 2029 staff data dashboard.

All other roles and staff and/or groups involved in decision making are referred to in Part 2.

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2. **Staff, Committees, and Training:**
    - *If this section is the same as Part 2, please just refer to the earlier text.*
    - **Roles and Responsibilities**: Define roles and responsibilities of individuals and committees, distinguishing between advisory and decision-making roles.
    - **Training**: Detail training provided.

Please see Part 2, section 1.

3. **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**:

EIA Integration: Demonstrate how EIA informed allocation of contracts to UoAs and policy/procedure development. Provide information on data, findings, and actions taken.

Equality considerations relating to this part of the CoP are addressed through the combined EIA described in Part 2, section 4. The full EIA will be published separately alongside the CoP.

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Part 5: Selecting outputs

Our overarching criteria for the selection of outputs the submission of our **highest quality research**.

Context and key changes for REF 2029
The CKU element of REF2029 captures the diverse contributions of each UoA through a pool of submitted research outputs. The number of outputs is determined by the **volume measure, multiplied by 2.5** and rounded to the nearest whole number. This element accounts for 55% of the overall quality profile, with the remaining 45% comprising Engagement and Impact (E&I) (25%) and SPRE (20%).

REF 2029 builds on the partial decoupling of outputs from individuals introduced in REF 2021 and shifts to assessing institutions and disciplinary areas within the HEI, rather than individual researchers. Decoupling separates the contracts used to determine the volume measure from the outputs submitted in CKU. This means that the link between staff and outputs has been broken for REF 2029. As a result:

- Eligible research outputs do not have to be authored by individuals whose contracts contribute to the volume measure (staff with SRR or determined as RI).
- Outputs do not need to be submitted to the UoA associated with the author's volume-contributing contract.

Other key changes since REF 2021 include:
- Staff details are no longer required for submission.
- Institutions must demonstrate that they supported the research submitted as outputs, which is evidenced by a substantive link to the institution.
- Outputs do not have to be submitted to the UoA associated with the author's volume-contributing contract, provided they align with the UoA's descriptors and substantive link requirements.
- There is no minimum output requirement for individual staff.
- The individual staff circumstances process for output reductions has been removed. Instead, a new process exists for requesting unit reductions.

Review of outputs
The criteria for assessing the quality of outputs are '**originality, significance and rigour**'. As in previous REF exercises, outputs are assessed against the standard REF star rating scale from four star (world-leading) to unclassified, providing a consistent framework for judging quality.

Our output selection process is managed through our annual Mock REF exercises. We have taken an inclusive approach, inviting staff to propose outputs they believe meet a minimum quality threshold of two star. To ensure the work of former staff is considered, their outputs are also reviewed, and we will use our research information management system, Pure, to identify any additional outputs that meet the minimum quality threshold. All proposed outputs then undergo peer review by both internal and external reviewers to inform final decisions on outputs included in the output pool for each UoA.

Reviewers provide narrative feedback and predicted ratings against the three criteria and an overall rating, in line with the REF 2029 definitions of quality. To support consistent and transparent decision-making, we use a 12-point scoring scale that works with the REF star ratings. Each REF star rating is subdivided to provide greater granularity, enabling more informed decision-making. The scale is applied consistently across both internal and external review and complements the narrative feedback provided.

All reviews are collated, and the data analysed by ERC and reviewed by the REF lead. It is intended that Pure will be used to determine the optimal output profile for submission subject to amendments in accordance with the criteria set out in the CoP. The REF Lead will make a recommendation on the final output pool for the UoA.

Internal review

- Internal reviewers are appointed from areas with relevant subject expertise.
- Each output is reviewed by at least two internal reviewers.
- Where there is significant variation in scored, a third review is undertaken for moderation.
- REF Leads oversee this process, supported by ERC.

External review

- External reviewers are appointed in line with institutional guidance and are independent experts in the relevant discipline area.
- More than one external reviewer may be appointed to a UoA to reflect the breadth of disciplines represented.
- All appointments are approved by the PVC-R&I, and reviewers are provided with the CoP.
- Outputs with an average internal rating of 2.5 star or above are normally sent for external review.

Feedback to staff

- REF Leads provide face-to-face feedback to staff at appropriate stages during the Mock REF cycle.
- Group meetings may also be used to discuss overall progress, though not individual review outcomes.

The outcomes of our annual Mock REF exercises, including predicted output ratings, are reported each year to the committees outlined in Part 2. These reports are used to monitor progress in the development of our submissions and to support strategic oversight and financial planning.

Statement on the use of Artificial intelligence
The University has not promoted or utilised Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools within our REF 2029 review process for the purpose of determining or predicting the profile of any element of the assessment. All judgements on predicted rating relating to outputs, impact case studies or SPRE statements that are made through academic peer review.

- **Policies and Procedures**:
  - **Identifying substantive link to outputs**

Requirements for identifying substantive link to outputs
For REF 2029, an output is eligible where the submitting institution can evidence a substantive link between the output and an author with an eligible employment relationship. The link must be established with an author who has made a significant research contribution to the output, and the employment relationship must have occurred when the output was first made publicly available during the output eligibility period, 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2028.

In Section 4 – Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU) guidance – REF 2029, section 6:
‘6.3.1. Eligible employment relationships are defined as:

- a minimum of 0.2 FTE for at least 12 months continuous employment (as defined by Section 210 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA 1996) or the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order

1996) by the HEI making the submission. Continuous employment may be demonstrated by a sequence of consecutive contracts **and**

- the role descriptor includes an explicit expectation of research activity (in line with the REF definition of research) within the role. 'Research activity' is not restricted by profession and an eligible employment relationship may be with any staff member who undertakes, enables or supports research.'

We anticipate that a substantive link will normally be demonstrated for authors who have SRR or who are determined as RI. A substantive link may also be demonstrated for authors without SRR or RI; however, in line with Section 4 – Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU) guidance – REF 2029, paragraph 6.8., we do not expect outputs to be submitted with a substantive link to an author who does not have the right contract. This includes staff on teaching only (or other excluded) contracts, unless an appeal regarding contract type has been upheld, as set out in Part 2.3. Appeals.

Criteria to identifying the substantive link
Table 7 sets out the criteria for identifying outputs where the substantive link is via our current members of staff. It provides a fair, transparent, and consistent approach that recognises their contributions and aligns with our Mock REF process, integrating with the output proposal process.

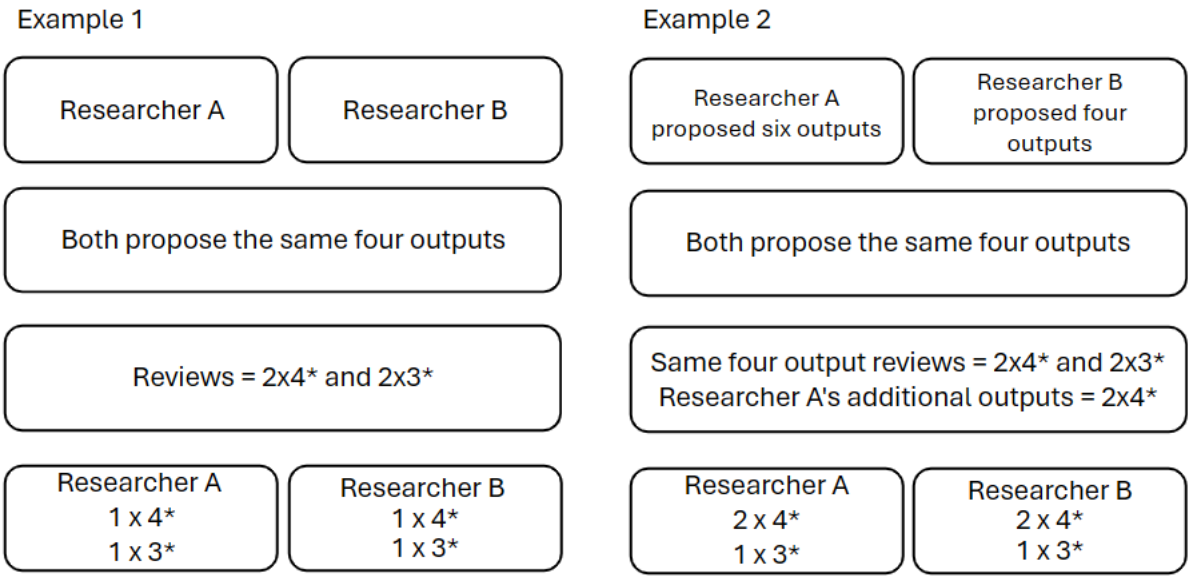
Table 7: Criteria to identify substantive link for outputs of current staff

Scenario	Basis for identifying the substantive link
Sole-authored outputs self-proposed by staff	Where a significant research contribution has been made, and the output is either sole-authored or co-authored with only one author from USW/RWCMD, the substantive link will be established through the eligible employment relationship of that sole author or co-author.
Co-authored outputs self-proposed by staff	Where a significant research contribution has been made and multiple authors are involved, the substantive link will be established through the eligible employment relationship of the author that proposed the output.
Co-authored outputs not self-proposed by staff	When an output has been identified through our institutional systems and has not been self-proposed by any member of staff, the eligibility of the authors and evidence of significant contribution will be confirmed in the first instance. Where only one eligible author is identified, the substantive link will be established through that individual's eligible employment relationship. Where multiple eligible authors are identified, the REF Lead will review the output and recommend the substantive link based on evidence of contribution, with due regard to the equitable distribution of substantive links across eligible staff.

There will be instances where an output has been proposed by more than one author. In these cases, we will adopt a fair and transparent approach, and the substantive link will be established through the eligible employment relationship by following a consistent process as exemplified in Figure 2 below.

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Figure 2: Process for establishing substantive link for outputs with multiple authors



Decisions and their rationale will be recorded to ensure transparency, consistency and alignment with the Mock REF process. In identifying substantive links, the process will take into account the **recommended maximum of five outputs per substantive link** and **representativeness** of outputs across the submission in line with REF 2029 guidance in Section 4 – Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU) guidance – REF 2029, part 3:
'3.4.1. Institutions are required to demonstrate the representativeness of their output submissions; this will include the expectation to address where more than five outputs are associated with a single substantive link.'

We intend to use the Pure REF 2029 module to manage our submissions and will consider the use of any integrated Pure output algorithm developed within the module to support the mapping of outputs in each UoA. All our submissions will also undergo manual review to validate compliance with REF 2029 requirements and to ensure the following indicators are appropriately considered:

- Open access compliance.
- Additional factual information as required by the UoA.
- Outputs with significant material in common.
- Best fit and representativeness of the research to the submission.
- Fair and transparent assignment of the substantive link.
- Recommended maximum of five outputs per substantive link if not identified by the Pure algorithm.

The mapping of the potential output pool will be conducted by the REF Leads. Recommendations on substantive links will be reviewed by the REF Strategy Group before being submitted to Executive and Academic Board for final approval. The HESA staff identifier will be used to identify a substantive link. Institutions are not required to submit any other individual staff information.

- **Selecting outputs where the substantive link is via former staff:** covering compulsory redundancy, voluntary redundancy or severance, retirement, expiration of fixed term contracts

The University recognises and appreciates the valuable contributions of all its former staff. Since the link between staff and outputs has been broken, REF 2029 now places greater emphasis on the assessment of the research supported by the institution. Thus, we consider it appropriate to include outputs that have a substantive connection to former staff, irrespective of the reason for their departure. Accordingly, outputs may be selected where there is a clear and substantive link to an author who has since left the University for the following reasons:

- Staff who have retired.
- Staff leaving after the expiry of a fixed-term contract.
- Staff who have been selected for voluntary redundancy or severance.
- Staff who have been made compulsorily redundant*.
- Staff who no longer work at the University for any other reason.

* For staff who have been made compulsorily redundant, output eligibility will be determined in accordance with the following REF 2029 guidance in Section 4 – Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU) guidance – REF 2029, section 6:
'6.7.2. Outputs where the substantive link occurred before the submitted output was made publicly available, will not be eligible for submission where the author was subject to compulsory redundancy.'

Criteria to identifying the substantive link
Table 8 sets out the criteria for identifying outputs where the substantive link is via former members of staff. It provides a fair, transparent, and consistent approach that recognises their contributions and aligns with our Mock REF process, integrating with the output proposal process.

Table 8: Criteria to identify substantive link of outputs of former staff

Scenario	Basis for identifying the substantive link
Sole-authored outputs	Where a significant research contribution has been made, and the output is either sole-authored or co-authored by only one former member of staff, the substantive link will be established through the eligible employment relationship of that sole author or co-author.
Co-authored outputs with current members of staff	Where a significant research contribution has been made, the substantive link will be established through the eligible employment relationship of the former staff member only where their contribution to the research is demonstrably significant, or where consideration of the maximum of five outputs per substantive link requires it.
Co-authored outputs involving only former staff	Where multiple eligible authors are all former members of staff, the REF Lead will review the output and recommend the substantive link based on evidence of contribution, with due regard to the equitable distribution of substantive links across eligible staff.

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The University will scope the contribution that the outputs of former staff can have on the output pool in all our potential submissions. The University does not intend to contact former members of staff who have left the institution.

- **Assigning outputs to UoA(s):** Considering interdisciplinary research and submitting an output to multiple UOAs.

Our approach to assigning outputs to UoA(s)
The University is responsible for determining the appropriate UoA(s) to which outputs are assigned. Outputs will be mapped in accordance with the REF 2029 UoA descriptors and the relevant Main Panel criteria and working methods, and with due regard to the University's R&I 2030 Strategy, the RIGs and their themes.

Outputs must demonstrably align with the disciplinary scope defined by the relevant UoA descriptors. Outputs are not required to be returned to the UoA associated with the authors volume-contributing contract. This approach provides appropriate flexibility in assigning outputs, particularly in the relation to interdisciplinary research, and ensures that output selection is representative of the contributions of all eligible staff.

An output may be submitted to more than one UoA where it meaningfully aligns with the scope of the UoA descriptor. Where an output is submitted to multiple UoAs, it will be assessed independently by the relevant sub-panels and may receive different scores. Interdisciplinary outputs will be considered on an equal basis and will not be disadvantages in the allocation or assessment of outputs to UoAs. This means that work spanning multiple disciplines will be treated fairly when deciding which UoA(s) it is submitted to.

The institutional process is outlined below:

- Through the output self-proposal process, staff may indicate where an output is considered relevant to more than one UoA.
- In such cases, the output will be reviewed within each relevant UoA, including internal and where appropriate, external review.
- Following the publication of the REF 2029 Main Panel criteria and working methods and UoA descriptors, a further review will be undertaken to identify outputs that may be suitable for submission to multiple UoAs.
- Recommendations for submission of an output to multiple UoAs will be considered by the REF Strategy Group, which will approve or reject proposals prior to final submission and make a recommendation to Executive and Academic Board.

Decisions and their rationale will be recorded to ensure transparency, consistency and alignment with the Mock REF process.

- **Procedures for supporting diversity of outputs**

Our approach to supporting the diversity of outputs
The University is committed to supporting and valuing a diverse range of research outputs, from traditional disciplinary to interdisciplinary research to practice-based or applied research, as well as outputs in other languages including Welsh, and outputs presented in British Sign Language (BSL). We support this commitment through the R&I Strategy 2030, the RIGs and their themes. Furthermore, initiatives such as our annual R&I Conference promote the breadth of research and encourages collaboration across RIGs and discipline areas.

Our annual Mock REF process allows staff to self-propose outputs. All outputs undergo a robust internal and external output peer review to ensure they are judged fairly. Practice-based and non-traditional outputs receive particular attention to ensure they are assessed appropriately in line with the REF 2029 Main Panel criteria and working methods. Feedback is constructive and provided in both narrative form and indicative scores, helping authors understand the strengths of their work. Where relevant, reviews may also suggest areas for improvement to inform future outputs.

Pure and our institutional repository (Research Explorer), support the management and storage of all research outputs, including practice-based and non-traditional research outputs, and any accompanying portfolio. This ensures that all outputs can be fully documented, reviewed and included in our submissions to REF 2029.

Outputs in Welsh and BSL are welcomed and will be assessed equitably in line with institutional timelines for our annual Mock REF exercise. The University will ensure that outputs presented in Welsh and BSL are not treated less favorably within the output review and selection processes. Internal and external reviewers will be sought who are both specialists in the discipline area and able to review outputs in Welsh or assess outputs presented in BSL, where required, competently. As stated in the Section 4 – Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU) guidance – REF 2029, section 16, outputs submitted in Welsh will be assessed in their original language without requiring translation or interpretation, although a short abstract in English (max 100 words) to describe the content and nature of the work will assist the REF in providing an appropriate assessment for the output. Where outputs are presented in BSL, the University will make appropriate arrangements to ensure they can be assessed fairly and equitably in accordance with REF 2029 guidance.

We also recognise the importance of research relating to Wales, including research related to individuals in Wales, our communities, culture, and our economy and society. This reflects our role as a civic university and our commitment to supporting research that changes lives and our world for the better, and the communities we serve. Research relating to Wales is assessed using the same REF 2029 criteria as all other outputs and we expect Main Panel criteria and working methods to provide reassurance that they will be treated fairly and equitably.

Decisions and their rationale will be recorded to ensure transparency, consistency and alignment with the Mock REF process. This ensures that all outputs, regardless of type or medium, receive equitable consideration in our processes and procedures.

- **Procedures for ensuring submissions are representative of the research undertaken within the submitting unit during the REF period:** Outlining the processes that will be undertaken to ensure that submitted outputs are reflective of the research strategies and structures, the diversity of research outputs, and contributions, collaborations and partnerships of the submitting unit and the unit's research strategies.

Our approach to representativeness in our submissions
Our overarching criteria for the selection of outputs is the submission of our **highest quality research**.

The University has established formal processes and procedures to ensure that submissions are representative of the research undertaken within each UoA. Outputs are mapped and selected in alignment with the R&I Strategy 2030, the RIGs and their themes. This ensures that our submissions reflect the breadth

of research activity, the diversity of outputs, and the contributions of all eligible staff, including collaborative and interdisciplinary research.

Staff may self-propose outputs for consideration for submission to REF 2029. This process ensures that outputs from all eligible staff are considered, supporting a submission that is representative of the research activity in the UoA. Each output undergoes a robust internal and external peer review process to assess quality and ensure fair assessment. Practice-based and non-traditional outputs are given careful consideration through our internal and external peer review process, with reviewers selected for their expertise in the relevant disciplinary or practice context. Supporting evidence, such as documentation, recordings, explanatory statements, or images, are reviewed as part of an output portfolio to ensure the originality, significance and rigour of the output are fully understood. Outputs are then subject to internal moderation and verification to confirm the selection of the output pool is representative of the unit's research activity and reflects the contribution of all eligible staff.

Decisions and their rationale will be recorded to ensure transparency, consistency and alignment with the Mock REF process. This demonstrates that the submission is both high-quality and representative of the research conducted in the unit.

- **Policies and procedures and responsible research assessment practice**

Our approach to responsible research assessment practice
The University is committed to responsible research assessment practices in the selection of outputs for REF 2029. While we are not signatories to DORA or CoARA, and do not have a standalone responsible metrics policy, our processes are designed to be fair, transparent, and consistent, reflecting the University's broader research assessment values.

Our approach is implemented through the following procedures:

- Staff may self-propose outputs for consideration in REF 2029, ensuring outputs from all eligible staff are considered.
- Each output undergoes a robust internal and external peer review process. Reviewers are asked to provide predicted profiles alongside narrative feedback. Final decisions on output selection are based on a holistic assessment of quality, taking into account the narrative feedback.
- Quantitative metrics such as impact factors and citation data **are not** used to assess outputs at any stage unless explicitly required by the REF 2029 sub-panels.
- Authors receive constructive feedback on the outcomes of the review of self-proposed outputs, which does not include references to research metrics.
- Non-traditional and practice-based outputs are given careful consideration. Reviewers with relevant disciplinary or practice expertise are appointed. Supporting evidence, such as documentation, recordings, explanatory statements, or images, are reviewed as part of an output portfolio to ensure the originality, significance and rigour of the output are fully understood.
- We recognise the diversity of outputs produced by our researchers at all career stages, and recognise that they may contribute in other ways, such as leading to impact.
- All outputs and associated evidence can be captured in Pure and Research Explorer, enabling outputs to be recorded, managed and included in REF 2029.

This approach ensures that the selection of outputs is equitable, transparent and consistent and aligns with REF 2029 requirements. It reflects the University's broader research assessment values, supporting

submissions that are both high-quality and fully representative of the research conducted across the institution.

- **Staff, Committees, and Training:**
  - *If this section is the same as Part 2 or 3, please just refer to the earlier text.*
  - **Roles and Responsibilities**: Define roles and responsibilities of individuals and committees, distinguishing between advisory and decision-making roles.
  - **Training**: Detail training provided.

Please see Part 2, section 1.

- **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**:
  - **EIA Integration**: Demonstrate how EIA informed the selection of outputs and policy/procedure development. Provide information on data, findings, and actions taken.

Equality considerations relating to this part of the CoP are addressed through the combined EIA described in Part 2, section 4. The full EIA will be published separately alongside the CoP.

Part 6: Appendices

1. **Referenced material in the CoP**

1.1 Application form for an 'Enhanced' member of a RIG

1.2 Glossary of Terms

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Appendix 1.1: Application form for an 'Enhanced' member of a RIG

Research and Innovation Group Membership – Guidance for USW Staff (v13)

Overview of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029

Approximately every seven years, the funding councils conduct a nationwide assessment of university research. This exercise evaluates:

A) The outputs of research activity
B) The potential impact of the research, and
C) The environment in which the research is undertaken

All publicly funded institutions are included. The next Research Excellence Framework (REF) submission is scheduled for November 2028, with results expected in 2029.

The REF is important because research is a core component of a university (in contrast to Further Education colleges). REF outcomes are used in some league tables, which can attract students, staff and external partners, and in determining funding allocations.

USW REF Preparation

Over the past three years, USW has conducted 'mock' REF assessments using the guidelines from REF 2021. This is because the full guidance notes (referred to as modules), have not been published by REF 2029. In January 2025, REF began publishing guidance notes for the next submission, available here: REF 2029.

There are several key differences between REF 2021 and REF 2029. One key change is how the volume measure (the number of outputs we have to submit) is calculated. Unlike REF 2021, the REF 2029 volume measure will use the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) record for staff on Teaching and Research (T&R) or Research-only (RO) contracts. Every member of staff on a T&R or RO contract must be aligned with a(UoA), but only those with significant responsibility for research (SRR) or research independence (RI) will contribute to the volume measure. This means we need to have accurate and complete data for our submission for all staff.

Code of Practice (CoP) and Staff Participation

Every university must create a CoP that defines which staff contribute to the volume measure. At USW, we propose requiring all staff to join (or confirm membership) of one of the Research and Innovation Groups (RIGs) that they primarily wish to align their research work, as either **Members** or **Enhanced Members**. Staff will normally join one RIG.

- Staff will be required to join a RIG. If you decide not to join, you will be allocated to a UoA that aligns with your job description/title. For example, if you choose not to join the Pedagogy RIG but your substantive role is in Education, you would be aligned to UoA C23 (Education) but not with SRR and therefore not contributing to the volume measure.
- Enhanced membership is required to receive a time allocation above the Research and Scholarship Activity (R&SA) that forms part of the 'standard' academic contract.

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Time Allocation (USW)

- **Enhanced Members** will be allocated SRR equivalent to 0.20 FTE (20%) of their contracted time, pro rata, fully dedicated to research. If a professor who would normally attract 0.30 FTE (30%) remission, pro rata, they will still need to meet the minimum contracted time dedicated to research.
- All members on academic contracts retain the usual R&SA time allocation of 12 ½%. Activities undertaken during R&SA time should be discussed and agreed by your line manager during your annual appraisal.
- Research only staff will be aligned with a Unit of Assessment, and their inclusion in the volume measure will be dependent on meeting the research independency criteria in table 1.

Membership categories

1. Member – Participates in RIG activities but does not receive additional SRR time.
2. Enhanced Member – eligible for SRR time allocation or RI.

Eligibility for Enhanced Membership is defined by the REF CoP Task and Finish Group following consultation and engagement with staff representative groups. Only staff with Enhanced Membership will receive SRR time allocation. The checklist is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Criteria for Enhanced RIG Membership/SRR and RI

Criteria	Met	Not met
Has a contract type that is Teaching and Research or Research Only		
It is agreed at annual appraisal, of leadership or contribution to independent research.		
The individual's research activity aligns with the university's agreed Units of Assessment for REF 2029.		
It is agreed at annual appraisal, that external research funding could be applied for, where opportunities exist.		
It is agreed at annual appraisal, that supervision of research students (PhD, EdD, MRes or equivalent) is permitted, where opportunities exist.		
It is agreed at annual appraisal, that the individual is eligible to act as Principal or Co-Principal Investigator.		
It is agreed at annual appraisal, that the individual is eligible to undertake research without supervision (e.g. has methodological independence).		
It is agreed at annual appraisal, that the individual is expected to produce research outputs of a quality and type appropriate to the Unit(s) of Assessment and to their stage of career.		

All the above criteria will need to be met by an individual who has/wishes to maintain, Significant Responsibility for Research[1]

All Professors and Associate Professors on the Research and Development pathway would normally be expected to be an Enhanced Member of a RIG and contribute to the volume measure. If you are a professor or associate professor via the Innovation and Engagement; Professional Practice; or Learning and Teaching route, you would need to meet the eligibility criteria outlined in table 1.

[1] Refer to the Frequently Ask Questions and/or you Associate Dean Research and Innovation and/or Research and Innovation Group lead if further clarification is needed

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Research Excellence Framework

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do I determine if my JD or appraisal objectives meet the threshold of research independence (RI)?

Normally, an individual who is undertaking independent research, is self-directed rather than carrying out another person's research programme. Further indicators of RI include acting as a lead or co-lead applicant on a grant, acting as lead or co-lead supervisors, or equivalent activities. If in doubt, the line manager will discuss the criteria with you and either your Associate Dean Research and Innovation or Research and Innovation Group (RIG) lead. Determining research independence will depend on role responsibilities and evidence of research independence as set out in the REF 2029 Code of Practice.

2. To receive the time allocation of 20%/0.2 FTE on my academic workload model (and have Significant Responsibility for Research recorded on the HESA return), does my research activity have to align with one of the University's UoAs?

Yes. We will be submitting outputs to the following Units of Assessment:

UoA 3: Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy

UoA 4: Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience

UoA 7: Earth Systems and Environmental Sciences

UoA 11: Computer Science and Informatics

UoA 12: Engineering

UoA 17: Business and Management Studies

UoA 20: Social Work and Social Policy

UoA24: Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism

UoA 27: English Language and Literature

UoA 28: History

UoA 33: Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies

3. Is there a threshold amount for research funding?

No there is no threshold for funding

4. Is there a minimum number of research students that I have to supervise?

No

5. Does all the research I undertake have to be without supervision?

Not all, but some evidence of your research activity needs to demonstrate research independence.

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Research and Innovation Group Membership Application

Your Name	
Role title	
Full Time Equivalent	
Faculty/Department	
Line manager	
Subject area (primary)	

Which Research and Innovation Group are you applying to join?	Applied Psychology
Membership type (please select from the dropdown menu)	Choose an item.
Do you have significant responsibility for research (SRR) or are research already or are research independent?	Choose an item.
Which Unit of Assessment has your work been aligned with	Choose an item.
Any additional points relevant to the application e.g., you are a member of more than one RIG	Please enter at most 150 characters

Glossary of Terms

USW	University of South Wales
REF	Research Excellence Framework
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
T&R	Teaching and Research
RO	Research Only
SRR	Significant Responsibility for Research
RI	Research Independence
CoP	Code of Practice
RIGs	Research and Innovation Groups
R&SA	Research and Scholarly Activity
FTE	Full time equivalent
UoA	Unit of Assessment
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
EdD	Doctor of Education
MRes	Masters of Research
JD	Job Description

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Appendix 1.2: Glossary of terms

ADRI	Associate Dean for Research and Innovation
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AWLM	Academic workload model
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BSL	British Sign Language
CKU	Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding
CoARA	Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment
CoP	Code of Practice
DORA	Declaration on Research Assessment
ECR	Early Career Researcher
EdD	Doctor of Education
EDI	Equality, diversity, and inclusion
E&I	Engagement and Impact
EIA	Equality Impact Assessment
ERC	Enterprise, Engagement and Commercialisation
FTE	Full time equivalent
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
MRes	Masters by Research
OA	Open access
OD	Organisational Development
PDAP	People and Diversity Advisory Panel
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PI	Principal Investigator
PVC	Pro-Vice Chancellor
REF	Research Excellence Framework
R&I	Research and Innovation
RI	Research independence
RO	Research only
RWCMD	Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama
RIGs	Research and Innovation Groups

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R&SA	Research and scholarly activity
SPRE	Strategy, People, and Research Environment
SRR	Significant responsibility for research
T&F	Task and Finish
T&R	Teaching and research
UCU	University College Union
UoA	Unit of Assessment
USW	University of South Wales
VC	Vice Chancellor