

Background

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the national system for assessing research in UK higher education institutions (HEIs). Each institution making a submission to the REF 2021 is required to develop, document and apply a code of practice on determining who is an independent researcher and the selection of outputs in their REF submissions.

Bournemouth University's Code of Practice was accepted by Research England on 8th November 2019. It was revised to accommodate national changes to the REF exercise and resubmitted to UKRI on 9 October 2020.

Staff are encouraged to read the [Code of Practice](#) in its entirety; however, a summary of the key points is provided below.

Summary of Key Points

For the purposes of the REF, research is defined as “a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared” ([REF Guidance on Submissions](#), paragraph 1).

Staff Eligibility

Staff are eligible for submission to REF 2021 if they:

- Are on BU's payroll on the 31st July 2020
 - Hold a contract of employment of 0.2 FTE¹ or greater
 - And either have:
 - A primary employment function to undertake 'research only' (as returned to [HESA](#)) and meet the definition of an independent researcher as outlined below.
- Or
- A primary employment function to undertake 'teaching and research' (as returned to [HESA](#)) and have significant responsibility for independent research (SRR) as outlined below.

Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR)

Staff on teaching and research contracts² are eligible for submission only if they are considered to have 'Significant Responsibility for Research'. To be considered as such an individual will need to meet at least **one** of these four indicators:

1. Leading or acting as principal investigator/equivalent or co-investigator on at least one externally funded research grant or contract since 1 January 2014.
2. Supervising at least one doctoral student between 1 January 2014 and 31 July 2020.
3. Awarded a doctorate prior to 31 July 2019.
4. Holding a research leadership position including Professor, Deputy Dean (Research and Professional Practice)/or equivalent, UOA Leader between 1 January 2014 and 31 July 2020.

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- ¹ For individuals with a contract of 0.20 to 0.29 FTE then we need to demonstrate they have a substantive connection to the University

² At BU this normally includes academic staff on BU pay grades 6-12.

These indicators are designed to be transparent, fair and consistent in their application as well as inclusive in their breadth, enabling the identification of all 'teaching and research' staff who have significant responsibility for independent research. Under Fusion, staff workloads can change on an annual basis; to be as inclusive as possible we are applying the indicators over the majority of the REF publication period.

Perceived output quality or volume of output will not be considered in the process of identifying whether an individual has significant responsibility for research.

Independent researchers

To be submitted to the REF staff employed on 'research-only' contracts must be considered to be independent researchers, defined for the purposes of the REF as "an individual who undertakes self-directed research, rather than carrying out another individual's research programme" (REF Guidance on Submissions, paragraph 131).

Under our Fusion strategy, we employ very few staff on 'research-only' contracts – these tend to be Research Assistants³ who are employed to support and carry out another individual's research programme. As such this section of the code of practice is anticipated to be relevant to only a small number of staff.

Where staff are employed on 'research-only' contracts we will use indicators to determine research independence. To be considered to meet the definition of research independence an individual will need to meet at least one of these two indicators:

- 1 – Leading or acting as principal investigator or co-investigator on an externally-funded research project since 1 January 2014.
- 2 – Holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship where research independence is a requirement since 1 January 2014 (see Annex 19 of the Code of Practice).

These indicators are designed to be transparent, fair and consistent in their application as well as inclusive in their breadth, enabling the identification of all 'research-only' staff who are independent researchers as defined in the context of this code of practice.

All staff employed on 'research-only' contracts who meet these criteria and are therefore considered to be independent researchers will have significant responsibility for research so will be returned.

Selection of outputs

Each submission will comprise a number of outputs equal to 2.5 times the combined FTE of submitted staff. A minimum of one output is required for each submitted staff member, with no more than five attributed to any individual (including former staff). The Code of Practice details processes that will be used to ensure a fair and transparent selection of outputs, without bias to any particular group of staff. This involves peer review of potential REF outputs before selecting in rank order the strongest available.

Equality-related circumstances

Submission of a pool of outputs rather than a fixed number per person is intended to provide increased flexibility in selecting outputs for submission. However, the funding bodies have put in place additional measures to recognise the effect that equality-related circumstances may have on research productivity. Such circumstances include qualifying as an early career academic, having taken family-related leave or secondments and career breaks, or circumstances equivalent to absence such as illness, disability and caring responsibilities.

Staff have the opportunity to confidentially declare the circumstances and to potentially reduce the number of outputs required by the unit or waive the requirement for them to have the minimum of one output.

³ At BU this normally refers to research staff on BU pay grades 1-5.

It is important to note that the REF rules prevent us from using any other source of information to take account of equality-related circumstances, and therefore even though you may have already provided this information to your department for other purposes, or if your circumstances are clearly known, this declaration form is the only route to having them considered for REF purposes.

All staff have been invited by Chair of the REF Circumstances Board to complete a disclosure form (Annex 15 of the Code of Practice) which should be returned directly to HR via REFCircs@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Further information on the Staff Circumstances Disclosure Process can be found on the Research Blog - <https://blogs.bournemouth.ac.uk/research/ref/ref-2021-staff-circumstances/> or from REFCircs@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Further information

Further information about the REF is available:

- Research England - www.ref.ac.uk.
- BU Research Blog – <https://blogs.bournemouth.ac.uk/research/ref/bournemouth-university-ref-2021-code-of-practice/>
- BU external website - <https://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/research/research-environment/ref-2021>

General enquiries about the exercise or BU's REF preparations should be directed to REF@bournemouth.ac.uk in the first instance.

Staff circumstances enquiries should be directed to REFCircs@bournemouth.ac.uk.