

University of Oxford
Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 Equality Committee
Terms of Reference

Background

The REF2014 has been designed so that it supports equality and diversity in research careers. The key element related to this is that individuals may be returned to REF 2014 with fewer than four outputs in cases where their circumstances have significantly constrained their ability to produce four outputs or to work as productively as might otherwise have been possible throughout the assessment period. The Funding Councils' require that "*institutions should have robust procedures to enable staff to disclose their circumstances with an appropriate degree of confidentiality¹*".

The Funding Councils have categorised individual circumstances into **clearly defined** circumstances; and **complex** circumstances. **Clearly defined** circumstances are those such as part-time working, or breaks from higher education due to maternity leave or secondment, where the amount of time absent from research is clear and a tariff can be applied to calculate the subsequent reduction in outputs required. **Complex** circumstances are those that require a judgement about the appropriate number of outputs that can be reduced, for example due to constraints on working productively due to ill health or caring responsibilities. See Annex A for full details.

Mechanisms for staff disclosure

All potentially eligible staff will be invited to use a form to disclose both **clearly defined** and **complex** circumstances; this form will be returned to the REF Project team (based in PRAS). The **complex** cases will be dealt with in confidence by the University's REF 2014 Equality Committee.

Individuals may choose to disclose by other routes, for example directly to a Unit of Assessment Coordinator or the relevant division. Where **complex** circumstances arise in this way, they will be passed to the REF Project team to provide to the University's REF 2014 Equality Committee so that they are dealt with in a manner consistent with those circumstances disclosed to the REF Project team directly.

Role of the REF Equality Committee

Purpose:

To provide a confidential forum for dealing with **complex** individual circumstances related to REF 2014 in a consistent manner.

Remit:

The REF2014 Equality Committee will:

- Deal with all **complex** circumstances (including any cases where there is a mixture of **complex** and **clearly defined** circumstances) regardless of whether they are disclosed centrally or via Unit of Assessment Coordinators/divisions.

¹ Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions (REF02.2011), paragraph 220.

- Collect (where necessary, and having discussed with the individual) and review evidence on individual circumstances. Evidence *may* be gathered from the individual, from Occupational Health and from departmental and divisional administrators responsible for personnel matters.
- Apply the REF Guidance, with reference to the worked examples provided by the national Equality Challenge Unit, and decide the minimum number of outputs which can be justified.
- Inform the UOA Coordinator of the minimum number of outputs required.
- Provide feedback to the individual on the outcome (i.e. the minimum number of outputs required); and, where relevant, sign-post the individual to sources of continuing support (e.g. Staff Disability Advisor, Occupational Health).
- Provide guidance, if requested, to Unit of Assessment Coordinators on dealing with **clearly defined** circumstances.

Membership:

Professor Chris Wickham

Professor Kay Davies

Professor Linda McDowell

Head of Equality and Diversity - Trudy Coe

Deputy Director of Planning and Resource Allocation – Chris Price [CHAIR]

Senior Personnel Manager – Colette O’Shaughnessy

Secretary: REF Project Manager – Gillian Rendle

Attending officer: Staff Disability Advisor – Caroline Moughton

Process and working methods:

The Head of Equality and Diversity, together with the Committee secretary and attending officer, shall review disclosed circumstances and seek further evidence as required. Cases will then be presented to the Committee, including a proposal for the minimum number of outputs required (1-4), for discussion and agreement. If insufficient evidence is available, the Committee will not be able to take the case forward.

The secretary and attending officer, with support from the Head of Equality and Diversity, will write the text required for REF1b (300 words max) for each case, after confirmation with the UOA Coordinator that the individual is to be returned, and with what number of outputs². The individual will be asked to read the text for submission in order to detect any factual inaccuracies.

Monthly meetings will be arranged for the Committee from May 2012, and used as necessary.

Confidentiality

The REF Equality Committee will observe confidentiality and academic members will not be shown confidential material related to staff from their own department.

² Please note that individuals still require outputs of sufficient quality, and that individuals may be returned with more than the minimum which they might be allowed.

Appeals against decisions on individual circumstances by the Equality Committee

Appeals will be considered by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Personnel & Equality).

Specifically the Pro-Vice-Chancellor will consider whether the REF Equality Committee had reasonable grounds for coming to its decision. No new evidence will be considered during the appeal. The following will be used to inform his decision:

- the evidence that the Committee considered
- any comparative cases that informed their decision
- the minutes of the discussion and decision

If the Pro-Vice-Chancellor determines that the REF Equality Committee had reasonable grounds for coming to its decision, the appeal will be dismissed and no further right of appeal is granted. If not the appeal will be upheld, and the REF Equality Committee will be required to revisit the case under the chairmanship of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Personnel and Equality). The subsequent decision on the minimum number of outputs required will be final and not subject to appeal.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor shall inform the individual who lodged the appeal of the decision in writing.

Annex A – Extract from Panel Criteria and Working Methods (REF 01.2012)

Category A and C staff may be returned with fewer than four outputs without penalty in the assessment, if one or more of the following circumstances significantly constrained their ability to produce four outputs or to work productively throughout the assessment period:

- a. Circumstances with a **clearly defined** reduction in outputs, which are:
 - i. Qualifying as an early career researcher (on the basis set out in paragraph 72 and Table 1 below).
 - ii. Absence from work due to working part-time, secondments or career breaks (on the basis set out in paragraphs 73-74 and Table 2 below).
 - iii. Qualifying periods of maternity, paternity or adoption leave (on the basis set out in paragraphs 75-81).
 - iv. Other circumstances that apply in UOAs 1-6, as defined at paragraph 86.
- b. **Complex circumstances** that require a judgement about the appropriate reduction in outputs, which are:
 - i. Disability. This is defined in 'guidance on submissions' Part 4, Table 2 under 'Disability'.
 - ii. Ill health or injury.
 - iii. Mental health conditions.
 - iv. Constraints relating to pregnancy, maternity, paternity, adoption or childcare that fall outside of – or justify the reduction of further outputs in addition to – the allowances made in paragraph 75 below.
 - v. Other caring responsibilities (such as caring for an elderly or disabled family member).
 - vi. Gender reassignment.
 - vii. Other circumstances relating to the protected characteristics listed at paragraph 190 of 'guidance of submissions' or relating to activities protected by employment legislation.