Queen Margaret University
EDINBURGH

REF 2029
Code of Practice

Queen Margaret University

Approved by QMU Senate on 6 May 2026, revised in response to SFC feedback

REF 2029
Research Excellence Framework

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INTRODUCTION

Queen Margaret University (QMU) is committed to upholding the principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in all aspects of its research environment and decision-making processes and acknowledges its obligations to comply with equality legislation. This REF 2029 Code of Practice (CoP) sets out the institutional framework for ensuring that decisions related to our REF 2029 submission are robust, transparent, equitable, and inclusive.

Institutional Processes

In line with the requirements of the four UK higher education funding bodies, in Parts 1-4 QMU outlines its processes for:

- Identifying staff with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR).
- Determining Research Independence (RI).
- Allocating eligible contracts to UoAs.
- Selecting outputs (including identifying substantive link, allocating outputs to UoA and ensuring that submissions are representative).

Alignment with REF 2029 Guidance

This REF 2029 CoP has been developed in accordance with the REF 2029 guidance published by the four UK higher education funding bodies, including:

- Section 3 – Volume Measure guidance.
- Section 4 – Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU) guidance.
- Section 8 - REF 2029 Code of Practice guidance.

In addition, some key elements of REF 2029 guidance applying to all institutions are incorporated to enhance clarity for staff, and some REF 2029 Dates, Abbreviations and Definitions are set out in the Appendices.

Key Principles and Developments in REF 2029

REF 2029 introduces several important developments that shape the CoP, including:

- Decoupling of outputs from individual staff.
- Volume measure based on the Higher Education Statistic Agency (HESA) data.
- Substantive link requirement.
- Representative submissions.
- REF 2029 Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE) assessment element.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

QMU is committed to ensuring that its REF 2029 processes do not unlawfully discriminate against individuals on the basis of protected characteristics. The University will:

- Develop and apply objective, inclusive, and transparent criteria for identifying staff with SRR and RI.
- Ensure that output selection processes are fair and representative.

- Monitor and evaluate the equality impact of REF-related decisions.
- Provide appropriate training and support to those involved in REF 2029 processes.

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PART 1: INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

How QMU CoP supports the REF 2029 principles

QMU is committed to demonstrating fairness to its staff by addressing the following through its REF 2029 CoP:

Robustness

The University ensures robust and consistent identification of contracts contributing to the REF 2029 volume measure through clear governance, transparent criteria, and auditable processes. Decisions are guided by SRR and RI criteria developed by the REF 2029 Strategy Group and refined through staff and Trade Union consultation, ensuring alignment with national REF 2029 expectations that submissions reflect genuine research responsibilities.

In line with REF 2029 guidance, the identification of eligible contracts for the volume measure is based solely on verified research responsibilities and is separate from decisions relating to the selection of outputs on grounds of their quality and representativeness. An annual process to determine SRR and RI is consistently applied across the university, using SRR and RI criteria to ensure decisions are grounded in the actual responsibilities of staff rather than title or grade alone.

Oversight by the REF 2029 Strategy Group ensures alignment with HESA staff record requirements and processes. The appeals process supports the fair application of SRR and RI criteria and enables staff to correct data inaccuracies, reinforcing the national commitment to accurate contract-based volume measures. All decisions, minutes and Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are logged centrally through approved institutional processes, ensuring decisions are transparent, traceable and auditable. Collectively, these mechanisms ensure that decisions are evidence-based, transparent, and auditable, supporting the principle of robustness within the REF 2029 CoP.

The 2024-25 pilot year demonstrated that the University's initial SRR criteria were overly complex and stringent, leading to the systematic under-identification of staff with genuine research expectations. They were also reliant on subjective judgement. Anomalies were evident following application of the criteria. In response, the University adopted a more robust and transparent approach grounded in explicit allocation of Research Time within AWAM, supported by TRAC reporting requirements to distinguish research from scholarship and by clearer alignment between contract type, research planning and workload allocation. This shift to a single, objective AWAM-based threshold for identifying SRR ensures a more consistent and inclusive process for REF 2029 and beyond.

Transparency

The University ensures transparency by communicating the REF 2029 CoP clearly, proactively and in accessible formats to all staff, including those on leave and absent from work. Our University REF 2029 Academic Lead and our Women in Research Champion actively promote the REF 2029 CoP and support staff understanding of the processes that underpin it.

Information is shared through multiple channels, including the dedicated REF 2029 SharePoint site, all-staff email updates, our staff Moderator, Principal's updates, and regular monthly REF drop-in (in person) sessions as part of an institutional communication programme. The REF 2029 CoP is also an Agenda item on institutional Groups and Committees. The approved REF 2029 CoP will be published on the University website for external access, with a hard-copy summary sent to staff who are absent from work.

To further support transparency and responsible research assessment, the REF 2029 Academic Lead provides staff training in line with our Institutional Statement on Responsible Research Assessment ensuring alignment with REF 2029 Panel Criteria and Working Methods, aimed at mitigating potential sources of bias, including disciplinary differences in citation practices and gender-related disparities in publishing. These measures ensure that all staff have equitable access to the REF 2029 CoP and a clear understanding of the processes that support its implementation.

Equity and Inclusion

The University ensures that decisions relating to REF 2029 are fair, impartial and inclusive by embedding principles of equity and diversity into all processes governing the identification and assessment of eligible contracts. Annual processes running up to the REF 2029 submission enable the University to identify all contracts that meet the criteria for SRR or RI, including contracts held by independent researchers and those associated with individuals with protected characteristics. New members of staff have additional processes following their appointment.

Equity and inclusion are further strengthened through institutional training on output self-assessment, REF quality definitions and QMU's policies on responsible research assessment, ensuring that assessment methods are applied consistently across contract types and disciplines.

Monthly REF 2029 drop-in sessions facilitate open discussion about processes relating to contract eligibility and output consideration.

EIAs have been completed and updated at all key stages to ensure that decisions relating to contract eligibility and output consideration remain fair, consistent and free from bias. The principles of transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity underpin all aspects of the University's REF 2029 processes and are reflected throughout the implementation of the REF 2029 CoP, including the development of our Strategic People and Research Environment (SPRE) Statements and our Impact Case Studies.

QMU supports part-time and fixed-term researchers as part of our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion in research. We take a robust approach to EIAs, considering equalities implications beyond the protected characteristics. EIAs include as standard practice consideration of any differential impacts for part-time and fixed-term researchers, and, importantly, any required mitigating actions.

Contextualisation within Institutional Policies

This REF 2029 CoP is grounded in QMU's statutory and strategic commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), responsible research assessment, and researcher development. The CoP sets out the processes for our REF 2029 submission and is underpinned by the University's Equality Policy, mainstreaming approach and equality outcomes for 2025–2029. Together, these instruments require that equality considerations are integrated into policy formation, decision-making, and day-to-day processes across the institution.

Governance and accountability are clearly defined. The University Court carries statutory responsibility for compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. Strategic oversight of EDI is exercised through the Equality and Diversity Committee (EDC), chaired by the Head of Human Resources (HR) with senior leadership representation and membership reflecting the staff and student body as well as the CoP Development Group and the REF 2029 Strategy Group. The EDC develops the strategic framework for equality in service provision and employment, advises Court on policy and procedure, and monitors delivery through associated forums, including the Student Experience Committee, Research Strategy Committee, Widening Participation and Student

Retention (WISeR) Board, Race Equality Steering Group, and the Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team.

EIAs are embedded within our mainstreaming approach. Since REF 2021, the University has strengthened capacity through a dedicated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Adviser, an updated EIA Toolkit and template, and a rolling programme of training. For REF 2029, EIAs are applied at two levels: (i) during the design of all REF 2029 CoP-related policies and processes; and (ii) following implementation to review outcomes and identify any unintended differential impacts. Findings are considered by the EDC and made available to staff via the REF 2029 intranet. An EIA of this REF 2029 CoP is provided in Appendix 5.

This REF 2029 CoP aligns with, and draws authority from, the University's strategic documents and sector concordats, including: the EDI Strategy (2023–2028) informed by the 2022–23 EDI Culture Review; the Mainstreaming Report and Equality Outcomes (2025–2029); Equal Pay Reviews; the Research and Knowledge Exchange (KE) Strategy (2022–2027); and the Concordats for Researcher Development and Research Integrity. The Knowledge Exchange and Innovation (KEIF) Strategy (2025–2030) embeds inclusive practice and community wealth building across our mission and provides a policy framework for equitable participation in research, knowledge exchange and enterprise. The CoP also supports delivery of our British Sign Language (BSL) Action Plan (2024–2030) and the Inclusive Learning and Teaching Materials Policy.

Collectively, these frameworks ensure that the REF 2029 CoP is consistent with institutional policy, legally compliant, and transparent, while remaining responsive to evidence from equality data and staff and student feedback. They also secure alignment between REF-specific procedures and the wider objective of building an inclusive, ethical and high-performing research and KE culture.

Update on Actions Since REF 2021

Following the REF 2021 EIA, which highlighted structural and cultural barriers affecting women, Early Career Researchers (ECRs), minority ethnic colleagues, part-time staff and those with caring responsibilities, the University has delivered a coordinated programme of institution-wide actions. The emphasis has been on improving fairness of opportunity, strengthening support for career development, enhancing the quality and completeness of equality data, and embedding responsible research assessment.

Alignment with Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2022–2027

QMU REF 2029 CoP aligns with the University's Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2022-27, which prioritises equality of opportunity and a positive research culture. Since REF 2021, QMU has advanced this agenda through the Concordat for Researcher Development Action Plan (2022–2025) and the subsequent Research Governance and Culture Action Plan 2026-2030, expanded training and mentoring programmes, and collaborative initiatives with other HEIs. EDI principles underpin institutional action plans for the Concordats on Research Integrity and Knowledge Exchange, supported by participation in activities such as Scottish Research and Integrity Culture Week and participation in the UKRIO Research Integrity online training pilot. Additional measures include appointing a REF 2029 Academic Lead and Women in Research Champion to advocate for gender equity, strengthening place-based partnerships through the East Lothian Community Wealth Building Charter and securing a three-year agreement with Edinburgh Napier University to enhance enterprise support and regional capacity. Collectively, these actions embed responsible research practices and inclusive development pathways across QMU's research and KE environment.

Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Fund (KEIF) Strategy 2025-2030

Launched in 2025, QMU's five-year KEIF Strategy embeds equality, diversity and inclusion within knowledge exchange and innovation by positioning Community Wealth Building and our anchor institution role at the heart of mission-led activity; introducing KPIs to monitor EDI progress; and creating Entrepreneur and Practitioner in Residence roles to champion race, gender and intersectionality. The strategy prioritises social justice, inclusive business models, and entrepreneurship as a driver of social mobility, while fostering FE/HE collaboration to address structural inequalities in sectors such as health and care. It also promotes gender equality in KE leadership and leverages QMU's academic strengths in applied, participatory research to advance inclusion and civic engagement.

Gender Equality and Inclusive Leadership

We appointed a Research and KE Culture Lead and a REF 2029 Academic Lead and Women in Research Champion to advocate for inclusive practices in leadership and submission processes. Participation in the Aurora programme was expanded and access improved through a streamlined internal process and an active internal network. Institutional commitment to gender equality has been reaffirmed through continued engagement with the Athena Swan Charter and the 2025 renewal of the institutional Bronze award, which informed a five-year action plan, including improved governance, progression pathways, data quality, support for LGBTQ+ staff and students, and increased representation of minority ethnic women.

Support for Early Career Researchers

The Researcher Development Training Programme (RDTP) has broadened to include narrative CVs, responsible metrics, knowledge exchange and impact. An interim internal mentoring scheme for research staff ran in 2024, complemented by participation in external schemes (e.g. British Academy ECR Network, Cross-Institution Mentoring Scheme, Scottish KE & Innovation Mentoring). A Research and KE Fellow role now provides support for Contract Research Staff into academic and governance opportunities. A Research & KE Culture KPI framework, informed by sector data (e.g. CEDARS), supports monitoring and continuous improvement.

Advancing race equality and intersectionality

The Race Equality Steering Group provides leadership on race equality and monitors data trends. Recruitment practice has been enhanced through a 12-month trial of the Rooney Rule and diversified advertising routes. Anti-racist curriculum and KE initiatives are being developed, supported by targeted roles (Entrepreneur in Residence and Practitioner in Residence) that champion race, gender and intersectionality. These actions respond to findings of the 2022–23 EDI Culture Review and are embedded within the 2023–2028 EDI and Anti-Racism Strategy and associated 5-Year Action Plan.

Equal Pay

The University's Equal Pay Report 2025 confirms sustained progress in reducing pay gaps since REF 2021. Between 2020 and 2024, the overall gender pay gap narrowed significantly, with the median gap eliminated and performance benchmarking well ahead of UK and Scottish HE sector averages. Disability pay gaps have also reduced, though remain a priority for action, and there is no significant gap by sexual orientation. While ethnicity pay gaps have widened overall, intersectional analysis continues to inform targeted interventions. Persistent disparities at senior levels, including the Professoriate, are being addressed through measures set out in annual Equal Pay Review Action Plans, ensuring compliance and advancing equity across all grades.

Diversity of Workforce

The University is committed to building a workforce that reflects the communities it serves and has made measurable progress since REF 2021. Between 2020/21 and 2023/24, representation of disabled staff increased from 4.7% to 8.6%, minority ethnic staff from 5.5% to 8.9%, LGBTQ+ staff from 5.5% to 7.6%, and staff aged 16-24 from 0.7% to 4.8%, while women continue to comprise the majority of our workforce (68.1%) and 62% of the Professoriate - well above sector averages. Gender balance on the University Court has been maintained in line with legislation. Despite these gains, minority ethnic representation at senior levels and disability disclosure remain areas for improvement. Actions to address these include membership of the Disability Confident Scheme and a trial of the Rooney Rule, as detailed in the Mainstreaming Report 2025.

Flexible and inclusive working practices

Hybrid Working Guidelines, inclusive scheduling and on-demand training have improved access for part-time staff and carers. Menopause Guidelines, Guidance on Disclosing a Disability and Making Reasonable Adjustments and wellbeing initiatives have been introduced, and the Dignity at Work and Study Policy has been updated to clarify reporting and support routes. Pump-priming in the School of Health Sciences has increased research capacity and outputs among part-time staff.

Promoting and protecting British Sign Language (BSL)

At QMU, we are highly committed to protecting and promoting British Sign Language (BSL). As a university which teaches BSL, we aspire to lead the way in terms of responding to the Scottish Government's BSL (Scotland) Act 2015. We are committed to the actions set out in our BSL Plan 2024-2030, which is ambitious, responsive, builds on our progress and which is continually shaped by national initiatives, local needs and the priorities of BSL users. We are committed to embedding our actions into REF processes and extend this commitment to the inclusion of other recognised languages (namely Scottish Gaelic, Scots, Ulster Scots, Irish, and Irish Sign Language).

Equality data quality and use of evidence

A dedicated HR Data and Systems Partner role appointed from 2022 has strengthened data infrastructure. Monitoring forms and new-starter processes were redesigned to explain the purpose of data collection and assure confidentiality. Annual campaigns, aligned to HESA cycles, have reduced the volume of "unknown" data (e.g. sexual orientation and religion/belief), enabling intersectional analysis that now informs Equal Pay Reviews and Athena Swan work. The first Staff Engagement Survey since 2015 has further informed priorities.

Research culture, integrity and responsible assessment

QMU is committed to fair and transparent mechanisms in the use of research metrics as outlined in our Institutional Statement on Responsible Research Assessment. The University is a signatory to DORA and endorses the Leiden Manifesto. Participation in the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) online course pilot and delivery of a multi-institution Research and Integrity Culture week have strengthened local practice. EIAs and structured training underpin all CoP processes for REF 2029, with findings reported through governance.

Knowledge exchange and place-based collaboration have been expanded through our role as an anchor institution, including the East Lothian Community Wealth Building Charter and a 2024 agreement to bring Edinburgh Napier University's Bright Red Triangle enterprise support to QMU and Edinburgh College.

Collectively, these measures address the issues identified in 2021 and embed equality and responsible assessment across research and knowledge exchange. Progress will continue to be monitored through governance, EIAs, equality data, and action plans associated with institutional strategies and concordats.

QMU's response to the REF 2021 EIA has been strategic, holistic, and embedded in institutional operations. Through targeted initiatives, policy reform, and sector-leading collaborations, QMU has demonstrated a sustained commitment to inclusive excellence. These efforts not only address past recommendations but also position the University for future success in REF 2029.

PART 2: IDENTIFYING STAFF CONTRACTS WITH SIGNIFICANT RESPONSIBILITY FOR RESEARCH (SRR) AND RESEARCH INDEPENDENCE (RI)

Background

The REF 2029 Volume Measure guidance requires that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) develop and record fair and transparent processes for identifying contracts eligible for submission to REF 2029, with the essential criteria used for identifying such contracts reflecting:

- **Objectivity:** Decisions are based on clear, measurable factors, not subjective opinions. In all instances this should be based upon the expectations of contracts as a function of employment, and not upon the quality or volume of what has been delivered as a result of that employment function.
- **Inclusiveness and non-discrimination:** Decisions are applied fairly and consistently, without bias, and promote inclusion in the HEI's research community.
- **Transparency:** Decisions are clearly communicated and accessible to all staff.

Eligible contracts are those that meet ***all*** the following conditions:

- **Academic staff**: the contract belongs to an academic staff member whose primary employment function is to undertake either 'teaching and research' or 'research only' activities, as recorded in the HESA Staff records.
- **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).

Further, the following 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.

In line with this requirement, the University undertook an early and inclusive consultation process to shape the criteria for identifying staff with SRR and RI. This proactive approach aimed to embed transparency and equity into the University's REF 2029 preparations and to support the mainstreaming of equality, diversity, and inclusion in research careers.

A University-wide consultation on the proposed criteria for identifying SRR and RI was conducted in AY 2024-25. This exercise was led by the Deputy Principal, Convenor of the REF 2029 Strategy Group and included a series of staff engagement events, as well as input from Trade Unions representatives. Based on consultation outcomes and completion of the EIA, further consultation took place in March 2026. Findings from this consultation informed the final criteria intended for use in the pilot year. Following the consultation, feedback was shared with staff, and the proposed criteria were refined to ensure alignment with the REF 2029 Volume Measure guidance.

However, and as noted above, application of the initial SRR criteria in the 2024-25 pilot year demonstrated that they were overly complex and indeed stringent unless decision-makers sought out additional information. The anomalies that became evident following rigid application of the criteria were resolved for the pilot year by broadening the definitions to identify any staff as SRR in the HESA return if they met any one of a number of clear and objective measures that could be evidenced with existing data (including Research Centre membership or being in a promoted position with a teaching and research contract). The final HESA returns in the pilot year were, ultimately, far more in line with expectations and with prior estimates of research volume, including those used in REF 2021.

The solutions to estimating volume set out here could not, however, be implemented in time for the academic year (AY) 2025-2026. Given this context of ongoing change (including the pause in REF criteria-setting) affecting the pilot year (AY 2024-2025) and the current AY (2025-2026), the elements of this Code of Practice dealing with volume measures (including SRR and RI identification) are primarily intended to apply prospectively, i.e. for AY 2026-2027 and thereafter.

The CoP sets out processes that apply following approval, which can occur no earlier than late Summer 2026. Transitional arrangements will therefore apply for AY 2025-2026, since at that time, not all the data nor processes required for future years are fully in place, nor is there a full REF 2029 Code of Practice to guide the institution or to set out the relevant processes for staff. Following the Equality Impact Assessments and internal reflection on the pilot year by the REF 2029 Steering Group, the University will use the pilot-year determinations as the starting point for the 2025-2026 volume measure process. Contracts previously identified as having SRR or demonstrating RI will be reviewed to identify any material changes to the contract or associated responsibilities. Existing determinations will normally be retained where appropriate. New contracts, and contracts requiring reassessment, will be considered using the transitional arrangements set out below, including the revised RI criteria for research-only contracts.

Given these processes of consultation and revision, we are confident that the University's approach is consistent with the REF 2029 requirements that:

- All eligible 'teaching and research' contracts with SRR and 'research only' contracts with RI are included in the volume measure.
- The criteria used for identification of contracts with SRR and RI are objective, inclusive, transparent, and developed in consultation with staff and their representatives.

Transitional Arrangements for SRR and RI

The following indicators will be applied to contracts held by staff on 'teaching and research' or 'research only' contracts in the transitional year 2025-2026. Unless circumstances have changed, these will be based on existing records established for the REF29 pilot year (2024-2025). The final pilot year indicators arose from the results of staff panels based on initial policies, anomaly checks, and consultation:

Criteria for SRR

- All staff members on 'teaching and research' contracts who have Type 2 Research Centre Membership will have those contracts recorded as having SRR.

Criteria for RI Research Independence is determined at contract level for research-only contracts. Research-only contracts identified as demonstrating Research Independence during the 2024-25 pilot exercise will normally retain that status in 2025-26, provided the contract continues to enable the contract-holder to undertake self-directed research.

In the 2024-25 pilot exercise, Research Independence was assessed against the pilot RI criteria. Following review of the pilot exercise, the criteria below were adopted for use from 2025-26 onwards.

A research-only contract will be identified as demonstrating Research Independence where one or more of the following criteria apply:

- Is a lead applicant on an external research or KE and innovation grant or equivalent (as per HESA definitions).
- Holds an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship where research independence is a requirement.
- Leads a research group or a substantial work package.
- Has a contract in which research independence is an inherent expectation.
- Makes significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research.
- Holds a G9 or G10 'research only' contract.
- Is named as a co-applicant on an externally funded research grant/award (UoAs 13-34 only).
- Has significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research (UoAs 13-34 only).

Note however that if, for example, where a research-only contract identified as demonstrating RI in 2024-2025 is subsequently changed to, or replaced by, a teaching-only contract, that contract would no longer be eligible for inclusion in the REF volume measure.

Policies and Procedures for SRR and RI

Criteria for SRR

The following single indicator will be used to identify those staff on 'teaching and research' contracts who have SRR in REF 2029:

- Staff who are allocated at least 18.3% of their total academic workload to research as part of their Academic Workload Allocation Model (AWAM) during the annual AWAM cycle.

Academic Workload Allocation Model (AWAM)

AWAM is the University's annual process for planning, allocating and recording academic workload. The model is designed to support the equitable, transparent and consistent allocation and management of workload across teaching and learning, research and/or scholarship, and academic leadership and administration activities. Workload allocation takes place through discussion between academic staff and their line manager as part of the University's annual planning processes.

Heads of Division are responsible for ensuring that AWAM is implemented fairly and equitably within their divisions. While the detailed process may vary between divisions, workload allocations are informed by professional judgement, operational requirements and collegiate discussion, and are agreed with the staff member and line manager. The agreed allocation is recorded in the annual AWAM record. Where agreement cannot be reached between the staff member and their line manager, the Dean will review the AWAM allocation and confirm the final outcome.

For the purposes of REF 2029, the final recorded AWAM allocation will be used as the evidence source for determining whether a teaching and research contract has a specific allocation of research time and therefore meets the University's criterion for Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR).

Criteria for RI

The following indicators will be used to identify research-only contracts that demonstrate Research Independence in REF 2029. Where one or more of these criteria are met, the contract will normally be considered to demonstrate Research Independence. Research Independence is considered persistent at contract level where the contract continues to enable the contract-holder to undertake self-directed research.

A research-only contract will be identified as demonstrating Research Independence where one or more of the following criteria apply:

- Being a lead applicant on an external research or KE and innovation grant or equivalent (as per HESA definitions).
- Holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship where research independence is a requirement.
- Leading a research group or a substantial work package.
- Where research independence is an inherent expectation of a contract.
- Significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research.
- Holding G9 or G10 ‘research only’ contract.
- Being named as a co-applicant on an externally funded research grant/award (UoAs 13-34 only).

- Having significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research (UoAs 13-34 only).

Decision-Making and Communication

The determination of SRR is based on a structured, transparent review of institutional data. Each annual review cycle confirms whether teaching and research contracts continue to demonstrate SRR status by checking verified contract-related information against the University's single SRR criterion as outlined above.

The determination of RI is based on a structured, transparent review of institutional data. Each annual review cycle confirms whether research only contracts continue to demonstrate RI status by checking verified data against the University's RI criterion as outlined above.

The roles and responsibilities relevant to the process are set out as follows.

Roles and Responsibilities

Appendix 5 provides a structured diagrammatic summary of the management of all the processes covered by this CoP. The key roles relevant to determination of SRR and RI are:

REF 2029 Academic Lead

- Jointly oversees the institutional process for determining SRR and RI.
- Ensures consistent application of the SRR and RI criterion across all divisions.
- Ensures processes align with REF 2029 policy requirements and institutional governance.

Human Resources (HR)

- Jointly oversees the institutional process for determining SRR and RI
- Maintains authoritative contract data within iTrent.
- Ensure that all individuals involved in the annual review cycle complete the University's REF 2029 Equality and Diversity Training Programme prior to participating in SRR and RI decision-making.
- Supports review cycles with data preparation and record-keeping.

Research, Knowledge Exchange & Development Unit (RKEDU)

- Provides advice and guidance on the application of REF guidance and procedures.
- Ensures integration of SRR and RI determinations with REF preparation activities.

Head of Division

- Ensures AWAM is completed for all staff on teaching and research contracts within their division in line with institutionally set timescales.
- Ensures AWAM information is accurately recorded and updated.
- Confirms accuracy of workload allocations and alignment with divisional structures and provides to HR on an annual basis by a set deadline.

Dean

- Ensures that AWAM is completed by all staff on teaching and research contracts across their school in line with institutionally set timescales.
- Signs off the SRR determinations for the School.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Adviser

- Supports completion of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs).
- Ensures the process remains fair, inclusive and non-discriminatory.

Annual SRR and RI Review Process

The University runs annual SRR and RI review cycles for existing staff. They form the authoritative record for SRR determinations and volume calculation. Each annual cycle follows the steps below:

Step 1 – Preparation of Institutional Data

- HR extracts contract and staffing information from iTrent.
- AWAM allocations for the relevant year are compiled and quality-checked.
- HR ensures the dataset is complete and aligned with REF requirements.

Step 2a – Application of the SRR Criterion

- The REF 2029 Academic Lead and HR jointly apply the SRR criterion to the dataset. Any queries are discussed at the annual SRR and RI panel meeting.
- SRR is confirmed where AWAM includes research time.

Step 2b – Application of the RI Criterion

- The REF 2029 Academic Lead, and HR convene at the annual SRR and RI Panel meeting to apply the RI criterion to the dataset and review the available evidence to support decisions.
- A research only contract is identified as demonstrating RI where evidence is found to meet any one of the RI criteria (only one criterion needs to be satisfied).

Step 3 – Local Verification

- The Dean formally verifies and signs off the determinations.

Step 4 – Equality Considerations

- An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is completed for each cycle.
- Any identified differential impacts are reviewed and addressed.

Step 5 – Recording of Outcomes

- Final SRR decisions are recorded within iTrent and reported to HESA in the annual staff return.
- AWAM records are held in the central AWAM dataset.

Step 6 - Appeals

Appeals may be submitted only where a material irregularity in the SRR and RI identification process is believed to have occurred. The full appeals procedure is set out in the Appeals

section below.

Procedure for New Members of Staff

New members of staff on ‘research only’ contracts will have their contractual RI status determined by the appointment panel, chaired by the recruiting manager in accordance with the university's RI criteria.

New members of staff on ‘teaching and research’ contracts will have their contractual SRR status determined within the first four weeks of employment, as part of the induction process led by their line manager.

Process

- The Head of Division confirms allocation of research time within the first four weeks of employment
- SRR status is confirmed within this four week window.
- HR enters SRR into iTrent and ensures AWAM allocation of research time is centrally logged.

Communication of Decisions

For both annual review cycles and new staff process, all SRR and RI outcomes will be communicated within two weeks of the decision being finalised. Communication will occur via the University email address or by postal letter for staff absent from work.

Notifications will clearly state:

- The SRR or RI determination
- The basis for the decision
- The right to appeal
- Acceptable grounds for appeal

This ensures transparency, accountability and consistency across all REF 2029 SRR processes.

The process for identifying staff with SRR and RI will be standard across all UoAs. There will be no variation in practices by the UoA.

Staff, Committees, and Training

Staff with advisory/decision-making roles in SRR/RI are required to complete our institutional EDI training and unconscious bias training. In addition, we provide training to relevant staff on Responsible Research Assessment. There is ongoing monitoring to ensure staff are up to date with EDI training throughout development of our REF 2029 submission.

Appeals

Both as an employer and public body, the University is required to ensure that its REF 2029 procedures do not discriminate unlawfully against, or otherwise have the effect of harassing or victimising, individuals because of age, disability, faith/belief, gender identity, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, sex and sexual orientation.

Staff have the right to appeal against the outcomes of the SRR and RI process. The REF 2029 Appeals Process applies to decision made from 2025-26 onwards. It did not apply in the pilot year (2024-25).

Appeals may be submitted only where a material irregularity in the SRR/RI identification process is believed to have occurred. A material irregularity refers to a procedural error or inaccurate institutional data (e.g., incorrect AWAM allocation or mis-recorded contract details) that directly affected the SRR/RI determination. The appeals process is the mechanism that enable staff to correct any HESA data inaccuracies relating to their record in respect of SRR and RI.

The following process will be followed in relation to appeals:

- A letter of appeal must be submitted in writing to HR, clearly stating the grounds for the appeal, within two weeks of the SRR/RI outcome notification.
- HR will acknowledge receipt and forward the case to the REF 2029 Appeals Panel, which is independent of those involved in the original decision. The Appeals Panel will consider only whether:
    - a material irregularity occurred, and
    - whether it had a direct impact on the SRR/RI outcome.
- The Appeals Panel may request clarification from HR, RKEDU, the Head of Division, or the Dean.
- A written outcome will be issued to the appellant within four weeks of the appeal being received.
- Any amended decision will be updated in iTrent (HESA record) and the central AWAM dataset, as required.

The Appeals Panel will include the following members:

- Deputy Principal and Deputy Vice Chancellor
- Vice Principal and University Secretary

HR will provide Secretariat support to the Appeals Panel.

REF 2029 Appeals Panel will:

- Oversee the REF 2029 Appeals Process.
- Ensure that REF 2029 appeals are considered before the final submission is made.
- Consider formal complaints where it is believed that there has been a procedural irregularity as set out above.
- Consider and make decisions on REF 2029 appeals from staff after they have received feedback on the reasons behind REF 2029 submission decisions in accordance with the established criteria in relation to the REF 2029 Appeals Process including:
    - Identifying staff with SRR.
    - Determining Research Independence

For the avoidance of doubt, the following elements of REF 2029 additional to SRR/RI are NOT open to appeal and will not be considered by the Appeals Panel:

- The University's overall strategy for submission related to selection of UoAs and the quality criteria for submission.
- The allocation of individual's research outputs or Impact Case Study to a specific UoA.
- The allocation of an eligible contract to a UoA.
- The University's judgement concerning the selection of outputs based on quality.

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

To ensure these processes are fair and inclusive, EIAs have been conducted on our procedures and criteria for identifying staff with SRR and RI, to identify any barriers or differential impacts on staff with certain protected characteristics. Any identified impacts in the development of these processes have been reviewed and addressed through mitigating actions and the EIAs were fed forward together with the CoP for a comprehensive EIA of the Code as a whole (see Appendix 5).

Pilot Year EIA

Following the pilot year 2024-2025, an EIA was undertaken to review the data on staff SRR outcomes. The findings of this assessment were used to inform changes to the SRR criteria. Therefore, the Code of Practice is intended to apply prospectively for the academic year 2026-2027 and thereafter. This follows its submission to REF 2029 for approval during Summer 2026. Due to this timing, the retrospective SRR and RI processes for HESA returns for 2025-2026 will use the same processes finalised for the submission in the 2024-2025 pilot year.

The assessment of outcomes data on the pilot year SRR/RI criteria found that, whilst most protected characteristics showed no evidence of adverse impact under the criteria, there was some evidence of potential structural inequalities existing within academia that could disadvantage specific groups when the criteria was applied.

As a small institution, the analysis of outcomes by protected characteristic used small sample sizes, meaning findings were treated with caution but still signalled some meaningful risks. In particular, data analysis of those identified as having SRR through the criteria found that young and early career researchers, disabled researchers, women and part-time staff were underrepresented. The assessment recommended reviewing and refining the SRR criteria to ensure fairness and inclusivity in the process, informing changes to the final criteria set out in this Code of Practice. It also recommended a number of actions which have been incorporated into the development of the commitments set out in the overall EIA and the final SRR/RI criteria, including actions to strengthen mandatory EDI and unconscious bias training, improve data collection, and take targeted action to address barriers for early-career, women, disabled and part-time researchers.

SRR/RI Criteria EIA

A further Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken to assess the updated criteria for identifying staff with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) and Research Independence (RI) following the changes made after the Pilot Year. The assessment found

that the updated criteria was largely fair and inclusive, particularly because Research Independence was recognised as a persistent status. This meant that staff who have experienced career interruptions—such as maternity leave, ill health, caring responsibilities, or fixed-term employment—would not automatically lose recognition of their research independence due to periods of reduced research activity.

As with the assessment from the Pilot Year, the main equality risks related to the potential impact of existing inequalities within academia. The assessment acknowledged that within the sector, women, minority ethnic staff, disabled staff, early-career researchers, part-time staff, fixed-term researchers and those with caring responsibilities may have fewer opportunities to access research leadership roles, secure grants, or receive sufficient research time within workload allocations. The assessment also recognised a broader risk of indirect bias in decision-making and workload allocation processes.

To address these risks, the criteria includes objective assessment criteria, multiple routes to RI, and an appeals process, alongside a range of mitigating actions including mandatory EDI and unconscious bias training for decision-makers, accessible communications, and ongoing support for identified groups who face persistent inequalities in research. Annual monitoring of SRR and RI outcomes will be undertaken to identify and address any disproportionate impacts on protected groups. Overall, the EIA concluded that the criteria was largely fair and inclusive, subject to continued monitoring and implementation of the identified mitigating actions.

We will continue to monitor and review EIAs throughout the REF process, particularly when we have access to new datasets such as future staff SRR outcomes.

REF EIAs are considered by our institutional Equality and Diversity Committee and accessible on our Equality and Diversity Committee SharePoint site.

PART 3: ALLOCATING CONTRACTS TO UNITS OF ASSESSMENT (UOAS)

Policies and Procedures

The decision on the UoAs submitted to REF 2029 is made at an institutional level by the REF 2029 Strategy Group and is approved by QMU Committees and Groups. The decision is based on, and reflects:

- QMU's previous REF submissions.
- The UoA to which each contract is principally associated in annual HESA returns.
- QMU's current and future strategic priorities for research and impact.
- the evolving nature of the substantive connections between staff groupings and those activities and priorities.

REF 2029 assessment requires that all eligible contracts must have a clear association with the submitting UoA and that HEIs should have a reasonable rationale when making decisions.

When considering the allocation of eligible contracts to UoAs, QMU will refer to the REF UoA descriptors and the following criteria:

- Staff contract i.e. their roles and responsibilities which align closely with the UoA.
- Staff centre membership and the work of the Research and KE Centre which aligns closely to the UoA.
- Nature of individuals research/research outputs which align closely with the UoA.

The allocation of contracts to a UoA will be made as part of the annual SRR and RI assessment process. Where more than one contract with SRR is attributable to an individual, each contract may be returned to a different UoA. UoA allocation may change between annual returns, reflecting the evolving nature of research and substantive connections.

Equality considerations at the time of the UoA allocation will be taken to ensure that these are fair and inclusive. Although there is no Appeals Process regarding the allocation of contracts to UoAs, staff are encouraged to discuss outcomes with their relevant Research and KE Centre Director.

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

To ensure our processes are fair and inclusive, EIAs have been conducted on our procedures and criteria for allocating contracts to UoAs to identify any barriers or differential impacts on staff with certain protected characteristics. Any identified impacts in the development of these processes have been reviewed and addressed through mitigating actions and the EIAs were fed forward together with the CoP for a comprehensive EIA of the Code as a whole (see Appendix 5).

The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for Allocating Contracts to Units of Assessment (UoAs) recognised that while the process was intended to be objective and was not based on the

volume or perceived quality of research outputs, there were potential risks of indirect discrimination or unintended disadvantage for some groups of staff. These include early-career researchers, disabled staff, those returning from maternity leave, minority ethnic researchers, part-time staff, fixed-term contract staff, and those with caring responsibilities.

The EIA identified that many of the risks arose from perceptions of "fit" within a UoA, differing levels of familiarity with REF processes, or potential concerns that evolving or interdisciplinary research profiles may not be fully recognised. To mitigate these risks, the assessment proposed a range of measures including mandatory EDI and unconscious bias training for decision-makers, opportunities for staff to discuss and understand allocation decisions with Research and KE Centre Directors, annual reviews of allocations as research develops, and the provision of information in multiple formats, including drop-in sessions and flexible consultation arrangements. The assessment also emphasised that allocations were determined by research alignment and contractual responsibilities rather than research volume or output quality.

Overall, the assessment concluded that, with these safeguards and mitigating actions in place, the allocation process could be implemented while reducing the risk of adverse impacts on protected groups and ensuring fairness throughout the REF 2029 cycle.

We will continue to monitor and review EIAs throughout the REF process, particularly when we have access to new datasets.

REF EIAs are considered by our institutional Equality and Diversity Committee and accessible on our Equality and Diversity Committee SharePoint site.

Staff, Committees, and Training

Staff with advisory/decision-making roles are required to complete our institutional EDI training and unconscious bias training. There will be ongoing monitoring to ensure these staff are up to date with EDI training throughout the implementation of our CoP and the development of our REF 2029 submission. In addition, we will provide training to relevant staff on Responsible Research Assessment.

Appeals

The following elements of REF 2029 are not open to appeal:

- The University's overall strategy for submission related to selection of UoAs and the quality criteria for submission.
- The allocation of an eligible contract to a UoA.

PART 4: SELECTING OUTPUTS (CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING)

Background

The REF 2029 assessment is a process of expert peer review, conducted by sub-panels for each UoA. Each submission element will be graded on a five-point scale, from unclassified (not meeting REF criteria) to 4* (world-leading). For outputs, also known as Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding (CKUs), the primary criterion for grading by the UoA (and hence the primary criterion guiding our selection for submission) is research quality. Quality will be assessed through academic judgement.

In REF 2029, the selection of outputs for submission must be underpinned by principles of robustness, transparency, equity and inclusion. The University's approach to output selection is informed by sector-wide developments, including the decoupling of outputs from individual staff members and the introduction of the requirement to demonstrate a substantive link between outputs and the institution.

The decoupling of staff and outputs removes the requirement to attribute outputs to individual staff members and eliminates the need to consider individual staff circumstances in output selection. This means that:

- eligible research outputs do not have to be authored by individuals whose contracts contribute to an institution's overall submission volume,
- these outputs do not need to be submitted to the UoA associated with the author's volume-contributing contract.

REF 2029 requires that all submitted outputs must demonstrate a substantive link to the submitting institution. This reflects the shift in REF 2029 from assessing individuals to assessing institutional and disciplinary contributions to research excellence.

In a change from REF 2021 there will also be **no minimum** output requirements for individual staff members. However, the University is required to demonstrate the representativeness of its output submissions in each UoA; this will include the expectation to address any case where **more than five** outputs are associated with a single substantive link.

Interdisciplinary research is explicitly supported in REF 2029. It is defined as research that integrates or applies approaches from multiple disciplines to achieve outcomes that could not be achieved within a single disciplinary framework. The University is committed to ensuring that interdisciplinary research is assessed fairly and equitably, in line with REF 2029 guidance.

All forms of research and research output will be assessed as CKU on an equal basis. In line with the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 and the commitments set out in our British Sign Language Plan 2024-2030, the equal treatment of outputs includes outputs in British Sign Language and extends to other recognised languages (namely Scottish Gaelic, Scots, Ulster Scots, Irish, and Irish Sign Language), which the University affirms will not be treated less favourably than those in English in the output selection process.

The University affirms that no output will be advantaged or disadvantaged based on the publisher, publication venue, or medium. Journal impact factors and journal hierarchies will not be used in assessment.

The University is committed to responsible research assessment and inclusive research careers. The number of outputs returned for REF purposes will not be used to evaluate individual researchers. Outputs being included in a REF submission, or not, will not influence career progression decisions for authors.

The University's output selection process (described below) includes:

- criteria for identifying substantive links to outputs.
- procedures for selecting outputs authored by former staff, including those who retired, left after fixed-term contracts, were selected for voluntary redundancy or severance, or were made compulsorily redundant.
- mechanisms to ensure that output selection reflects the diversity of research activity and diverse output types used.

These processes are designed to ensure that all submitted outputs are representative of the research undertaken within the submitting unit during the REF period and that they meet the eligibility requirements set out in the REF 2029 guidance.

An overview diagram (Appendix 3) shows the overall stages of output selection (longlisting and shortlisting), the data-sources used, key responsibilities, and the relationship between ongoing processes of research assessment for internal purposes vs. those specifically related to preparation for submission to REF 2029.

Policies and Procedures

Identifying substantive link to outputs

Substantive links will be checked for shortlisted outputs only (rather than for all outputs at an earlier stage). This reduces workload at the UoA level, centralises expertise and workload to collate evidence of substantive linking, ensures an equal approach across all UoA, and reduces risks of bias in output selection.

HR will check that there is an author of each shortlisted output who had been continuously in employment at 0.2 FTE for at least 12 months, (taking into account that continuous employment may be demonstrated by a sequence of consecutive contracts). HR will further check that the role descriptor of the author includes an explicit expectation of research activity within the role (in line with the REF definition of research). 'Research activity' is not restricted by profession, and an eligible employment relationship may be met by any staff member engaged in one or more of the following:

- Undertaking research.
- Enabling research.
- Supporting research.

Furthermore, the eligible employment relationship must have occurred in one of the following time-based relationships with the output:

- The employment relationship may span the date on which the submitted output was first made publicly available.

- The employment relationship may have occurred before the submitted output was first made publicly available, but the research resulting in the output must have been carried out during specific time limits:
    - For most outputs, the date by which the eligible employment relationship ended must be under two years before the output was first made publicly available.
    - For long-form or extended process outputs, the date by which the eligible employment relationship ended must be under five years before the output was first made publicly available.
- Exceptionally, in the case of long-form or extended process outputs, the output may have been made publicly available within a time-limited period of five years before the eligible employment relationship commenced so long as the output was first made available during the census period.

In supporting documentation, against each shortlisted output title and the date at which it was first made publicly available, the following information will be recorded:

- the author's name.
- the qualifying period.
- confirmation that the author's role is eligible.
- type(s) of research activity.

This supporting documentation will be held in HR/RKEDU. The only information shared with REF 2029 UoA Leads will be confirmation that the output has a substantive link, or confirmation that it does not. Outputs for which there is no confirmed substantive link will be ineligible for shortlisting in any UoA.

Exceptional cases establishing further types of substantive link may be considered if they meet the following criteria, but only if they are agreed following a special request for clearance to include them (in the first bullet point). If agreed as exceptions, the additional evidence will need to be stored. For outputs that can be argued to meet the criteria for the long-form and/or extended process exception, a 100-word justification will be required. Such outputs will also be considered for double weighting.

- Outputs sole-authored by staff on teaching-only, honorary emeritus contracts, or other non-research contracts may be submitted, where the institution has provided allocated time and funding to support that specific research activity. (Further details on the process to request clearance to submit these outputs will be published as part of future guidance regarding special requests.)
- Outputs authored by individuals while on an excluded contract may be eligible for submission if the individual subsequently moved to a 'teaching and research' or 'research only' contract during the REF period, subject to the following conditions:
    - the contracts were both held at the same institution and meet the definition of continuous employment,
    - all other eligibility criteria for an eligible employment relationship are met within the output census period,

- the excluded contract type is one of: postgraduate research students (including PhD theses); visiting or honorary staff; staff on 'teaching only contracts; individuals employed on academic or other contracts with no explicit expectation of research within the job role, technical teaching or support only contract.

Selecting Outputs where the only Substantive Link is via Former Staff

In the case that an output has no substantive link other than to REF 2029 Eligible Staff who are no longer in employment at the time of the REF 2029 submission, then the following approaches will be taken to prevent the exploitation of the research of former staff while recognising the desirability of recognising their contribution:

- If there is no link other than via an author who was a staff member who was made compulsorily redundant, the output will be **ineligible** for shortlisting.
- If there is no link other than via an author who was formerly a staff member who electively ended their employment, including cases of retirement, or where the staff member reached the end of a fixed term contract, the output **will be eligible** for shortlisting.
- If there is no link other than via an author who was formerly a staff member who elected to take voluntary redundancy or severance, the output **will be eligible** for shortlisting.
- If there is no link other than via an author who has died, then the output **will be eligible** for shortlisting.

Assigning Outputs to UoA(s)

All outputs representing CKU from research at QMU are collected on an ongoing basis, at time of acceptance, by the Learning and Resource Centre (LRC) and publicly recorded on the University's online repository eResearch as part of the University's commitment to Open Access. Additionally, newly appointed staff's current, recent and historic outputs are added to support access to all their research work. Ongoing annual research quality evaluation activity by Research and KE Centre Directors allows the identification of all outputs which are rated internally as 3* or 4* by a disciplinary expert (usually the Centre Directors, a delegate, and/or an author).

The primary strategy in identifying outputs for REF 2029 will be to focus first on outputs for which there is existing evidence (from expert and author rating) of excellence. All such outputs published during the output census period, rated 3*4*, are primary candidates for REF 2029 longlisting.

For each UoA to which QMU intends to submit, a UoA Lead (appointed by the REF 2029 Strategy Group) with the support of Research and KE Centre Directors, will construct and maintain a UoA-specific longlist of outputs for REF 2029. Outputs might be submitted to one or more UoA, so the disciplinary expert ratings and longlists need to be specific to each UoA.

An output may be submitted to more than one UoA. Multiple submission is mostly likely in the case of outputs representing interdisciplinary research, and identification of interdisciplinarity will be encouraged. Each UoA Lead will evaluate outputs independently, in order to facilitate the representative selection of high-rated outputs. Ratings of outputs in different UoA longlists will not be aligned, to respect disciplinary differences.

Reflecting the principle of decoupling, assignment of outputs to UoA(s) will not rely in any way on knowledge of whether some or all authors have SRR or whether they contribute to the volume measure for any specific UoA.

Initial longlist construction

All 3* and 4* rated outputs (as recorded through Research and KE Centre Director assessments or pre-existing review and Centre membership processes) will be re-evaluated for REF 2029 by each UoA Lead in terms of their representativeness to the UoA, drawing additionally on disciplinary expert raters to assess their quality. This results in the creation of initial longlists for each UoA. A verification check will then be undertaken to ensure that every 3* and 4* output is included on at least one UoA longlist, and that each longlist reflects the breadth of the UoA's research strategy across the output census period. Outputs appearing on multiple UoA longlists will be independently rated for each UoA to preserve the integrity of disciplinary assessment. All outputs on the initial UoA longlists will subsequently be subject to further Open Access eligibility checks.

The completed initial longlists will be submitted to the REF 2029 Strategy Group and RKEDU, after which longlist maintenance will undertaken by the UoA Lead (top-down longlist maintenance) and by research staff and authors (bottom-up longlist maintenance). The maintained longlists will be the definitive source for shortlisting.

Top-down longlist maintenance

Newly-identified outputs will be collated by the LRC and provided on a quarterly basis to align with the REF 2029 Strategy Group's review cycle. They will also be provided to Research and KE Centre Directors to inform annual review processes and ongoing monitoring of research activity. All outputs will be subject to Open Access eligibility checks, reflecting the continuing REF 2029 requirement for journal articles and conference proceedings to meet Open Access standards where in scope.

Each new output will be assessed by disciplinary experts for assignment to at least one relevant UoA, in accordance with REF 2029 guidance on the appropriate allocation of outputs to UoAs and the expectation that submissions should represent the breadth of the unit's research activity and strategy. They will be quality-rated by UoA disciplinary experts.

Outputs with a quality rating of 3* or 4* will be added to the appropriate UoA longlist. The augmented longlist will undergo further iterations of longlist maintenance. These maintained longlists will form the basis for the ultimate stage of output shortlisting. This transparent and policy-compliant approach to output selection is fully aligned with REF 2029 CKU requirements.

Longlist limits

Longlists will not be subject to minimum or maximum length limits, being formed before volume measure information is available or finalised. Maintenance of longlists likewise will not reflect estimated volume measures but will be based on quality and representativeness.

Bottom-up longlist maintenance:

During 2026/27 and 2027/28, quarterly calls will be issued to all staff by the REF 2029 Strategy Group to identify newly-produced research outputs that authors self-rate as being of 3* or 4* quality. Authors will be requested to inform the relevant UoA Lead and asked to confirm that

they have undertaken REF 2029 output rating and calibration training. In accordance with REF 2029 expectations that institutions develop transparent internal processes for selecting outputs and assigning them to the most appropriate UoA, all author-rated outputs that do not already appear on existing UoA longlists will be added to one or more relevant longlists, if they are eligible under Open Access criteria.

New eligible outputs (i.e. those rated 3* or 4* by authors) will additionally be rated by the relevant UoA Lead or a disciplinary expert. The outputs will also be reviewed for potential relevance to other UoAs in the institutional UoA list, consistent with REF 2029 guidance that outputs be assigned to the most appropriate UoA and that submissions should represent the breadth of disciplinary activity.

Where outputs already appear on longlists, author ratings will be added to those provided previously by other disciplinary experts.

Where discrepancies exist between quality ratings provided by disciplinary experts and authors, the UoA lead will seek additional, specific, and collaborative rating input from the author(s). If a persistent divergence remains, particularly where ratings fall above or below the 3* threshold, the UoA lead will commission further expert review to support determination of a final quality rating.

In line with good assessment practice and the REF's emphasis on consistent disciplinary calibration, expert ratings will normally be given greater weight, as they are based on comparative evaluation that has been calibrated across multiple outputs, reflecting discipline/UoA-specific standards, and benefit from REF-specific training on unconscious bias in quality evaluation.

Shortlisting

The shortlisting stage incorporates REF 2029 volume measures. This stage is intended to constrain the number of candidate outputs to an appropriate size. A shortlist should contain the highest rated outputs from the relevant longlist and to be broadly representative for its UoA.

In accordance with REF 2029 principles of decoupling outputs from individuals, no staff-specific or contract-specific information will be provided to, or used by, UoA leads during shortlisting. Outputs need to be treated equitably and so will not associated with individual volumetrics, consistent with the REF requirement that outputs are submitted at UoA level rather than attributed to named staff.

Using quality ratings and metadata in the UoA longlists, outputs will be ranked for potential inclusion based on the following criteria, applied in order of importance:

- existing quality ratings.
- reduction of risk of an unclassified score where multiple similar outputs exist.
- representativeness of the outputs in relation to the UoA's disciplinary activity and strategic breadth.
- diversity of output types.

For each UoA, a ranked shortlist will be generated from the longlist. The shortlist should contain sufficient outputs to meet the minimum submission requirement (2.5 times the UoA's

volume indicator). Indeed, to support resilience in final selection, each shortlist will be required to exceed the relevant UoA's volume measure by a small margin (e.g., 10%), with additional lower-ranked items forming a reserve list.

To be included on a shortlist, each output will be checked for eligibility in terms of the substantive link requirement, ensuring institutional support or employment connection in accordance with REF 2029 CKU rules. Shortlisted items will also be reviewed at this stage for their potential suitability for double weighting, where applicable.

If the shortlist does not exceed the required volume measure, such as in cases where insufficient 3* or 4* outputs have been identified, lower rated outputs from the longlist will be considered and ranked for inclusion using the same criteria of rating, risk reduction, representativeness and diversity of output types.

Shortlists will remain open to revision as new eligible outputs emerge from ongoing augmentation of longlists, changes to volume measure, or other relevant changes. Shortlists will be updated until the selection is finalised for submission to REF 2029.

Finalisation of output selection shortlists for submission

Shortlists for each UoA will be finalised by the REF 2029 Strategy Group in advance of the REF2029 submission deadline, following a structured evaluation process that incorporates all requirements of the REF 2029 CKU guidance. This stage will consider only shortlisted outputs confirmed as eligible. It will confirm that outputs have substantive links in accordance with institutional procedures and will confirm that outputs linked solely to former staff, and any exceptions, meet all relevant guidance. Finalisation will proceed on the basis of a set of criteria applied in strict order of importance.

First, priority will be given to the relative ranking of candidate outputs within the UoA shortlist, reflecting the REF requirement that submissions demonstrate the highest possible quality of CKU, assessed in terms of originality, significance and rigour.

Second, outputs that demonstrate consistently high ratings across all disciplinary expert raters will be favoured. Where close comparisons arise, particularly near the inclusion threshold, additional expert ratings or fine-grained ranking exercises may be undertaken to ensure robust and defensible differentiation, consistent with REF 2029 expectations for calibration and assessment consistency across disciplinary areas.

Third, the REF 2029 Strategy Group will evaluate, at this stage, the extent to which the shortlist as a whole represents the breadth of the UoA's research activity and strategy, in alignment with the REF 2029 guidance that submissions reflect the full scope of disciplinary contribution rather than individual-level patterns.

Finally, consideration will be given to the diversity of output types, reflecting the REF's explicit encouragement for institutions to submit a wide and discipline-appropriate range of output formats.

Through the application of these criteria, the REF 2029 Strategy Group will ensure that the finalisation of each UoA shortlist generates a balanced, high-quality and policy-compliant selection of outputs for submission to REF 2029.

Policies and procedures for responsible research assessment practice

The University will apply fair and transparent mechanisms in the use of research metrics for

the selection of outputs for REF 2029 following REF 2029 Guidance. Furthermore, the use of metrics will be undertaken as outlined in our Institutional Statement on Responsible Research Assessment. The statement provides a set of principles outlining good practice that reinforce the key role of peer review, which support an inclusive and transparent process to research assessment which is respectful of researchers, and which recognise the plurality of research practice. This statement is published on the University website https://www.qmu.ac.uk.

We support the recommendations and principles set out by the global and national initiatives calling for improvements in the ways in which the outputs of scholarly research are evaluated, seeking to develop and promote best practice. These include San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, Research England The Metric Tide Report (2015), the Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics (2015), and the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (2022).

At this point in the development of AI tools for peer review, we do not believe they are unbiased, robust or transparent enough to be relied on for the qualitative evaluation of outputs during shortlisting. Consequently, we will incorporate the aspect of UKRI's guidance (2024) on use of AI for assessment, that "assessors, including reviewers and panellists, must not use generative AI tools as part of their assessment activities". Rating of outputs for REF 2029 will not use AI (Large Language Models) to analyse the quality of the content of publications.

Staff, Committees, and Training

Staff with advisory/decision-making roles are required to complete our institutional EDI training and unconscious bias training. There will be ongoing monitoring to ensure these staff are up to date with EDI training throughout the implementation of our CoP and the development of our REF 2029 submission. In addition, we will provide training to relevant staff on responsible research assessment, including to all Research and KE Centres and to authors wishing to self-rate outputs as part of the bottom-up rating of outputs for longlist formation.

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

To ensure our processes are fair and inclusive, EIAs have been conducted on three aspects of this CoP during its creation, namely the determination of SRR, allocation of staff to UOAs, and the procedures and criteria for selecting outputs. These were intended to identify any barriers or differential impacts on staff with protected characteristics. Any identified impacts in the development of these processes have been reviewed and addressed through mitigating actions and the EIAs were fed forward together with the CoP for a comprehensive EIA of the Code as a whole (see Appendix 5).

The Equality Impact Assessment on shortlisting and selection of outputs found the process to be largely fair and inclusive, but identified a number of potential indirect equality risks. Across several protected characteristics, there was a risk that researchers with non-linear career pathways could be disadvantaged by processes that rely on visibility, self-assessment, or the ability to demonstrate a continuous substantive link to the institution. A number of identified groups could face challenges in evidencing continuous employment histories or maintaining academic visibility where careers have included interruptions. Cultural or social marginalisation could reduce confidence in self-rating outputs at the 3* and 4* levels, creating a risk that some groups may undersell the quality of their work.

The assessment also noted that some groups may face risks of reduced visibility in bottom-up output selection processes. The EIA therefore recognised that apparently neutral output-selection processes could indirectly reproduce existing structural inequalities if these factors were not actively considered.

To mitigate these risks, the assessment proposed a range of measures including mandatory equality, diversity and unconscious bias training for decision-makers, REF-specific rating calibration training across research centres and targeted areas of support for groups identified at risk. The assessment also committed to ensuring the provision of multiple forms of accessible information provision, drop-in sessions, alternative methods of engagement, and ongoing monitoring of outcomes by protected characteristic. Collectively, these measures are intended to ensure that output shortlisting and selection processes are transparent, equitable, and do not disadvantage researchers whose career trajectories, working patterns, or personal circumstances differ from traditional academic pathways.

Overall, the assessment concluded that, with the safeguards and mitigating actions in place, the selection process could be implemented while reducing the risk of adverse impacts on protected groups and ensuring fairness throughout the REF 2029 cycle.

We will continue to monitor and review EIAs throughout the REF process, particularly when we have access to new datasets. REF EIAs are considered by our institutional Equality and Diversity Committee and accessible on our Equality and Diversity Committee SharePoint site.

An overall EIA of this Code of Practice, reflecting on issues and solutions found during its development, is included in Appendix 5.

Appeals

The following elements of REF 2029 are not open to appeal:

- The allocation of individual's research outputs or Impact Case Study to a specific UoA.
- The University's judgement concerning the selection of outputs based on quality.

APPENDIX 1. ABBREVIATIONS

AWAM - Academic Workload Allocation Model

CKUs - Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding

CoP - Code of Practice

ECRs - Early Career Researchers

EDC - Equality and Diversity Committee

EDI - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

EIA - Equality Impact Assessment

HoD - Head of Division

HEIs - Higher Education Institutions

HESA - Higher Education Statistic Agency

HR – Human Resources

I&E - Impact and Engagement

KEIF - Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Fund

QMU – Queen Margaret University

REF – Research Excellence Framework

RKEDU - Research and Knowledge Exchange Development Unit

RSC - Research Strategy Committee

RDTP - Researcher Development Training Programme

RI - Research Independence

SPRE - Strategy, People and Research Environment

SRR - Significant Responsibility for Research

UoAs - Unit of Assessment

UKRIO - UK Research Integrity Office

WISeR - Widening Participation and Student Retention

APPENDIX 2. DEFINITIONS (AS PER REF 2029 GUIDANCE)

Research

A process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared. This includes:

- work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, culture, society, and/or to the public and voluntary sectors.
- scholarship, which is defined for the REF as the creation, development and maintenance of the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines, in forms such as dictionaries, scholarly editions, catalogues and contributions to major research databases.
- the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights.
- the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction.

The definition of research excludes:

- the routine testing and routine analysis of materials, components and processes such as for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques.
- the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research.
- Effectively shared includes research that is published, disseminated or made publicly available in the form of assessable research outputs, and confidential reports.

Impact

An effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia; which will be assessed in terms of ‘rigour, reach and significance’.

Engagement

An interaction between the HEI and relevant individuals, groups, communities, organisations, the public, commercial partners, or policy makers, that is purposeful, responsible and context appropriate.

Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR)

Contracts with SRR 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. Indicators of explicit time and resources could include one or more of the following:

- A specific proportion of time allocated for research, as determined in the context of the institution’s practices, and applied in a consistent way.
- Research allocation in a workload model or equivalent.

Research Independence

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.

Eligible employment relationships

Eligible employment relationships are defined as follows:

- 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.

Submitting Unit

A collection of subject structures, research groups and activity in an HEI, that collectively contribute to all or part of the total institutional submission to a Unit of Assessment.

Substantive Link

A verifiable connection between the institution and the research underpinning the output. This link must be evidenced through an eligible employment relationship with the author (or equivalent), and may be demonstrated in one of the following ways:

- the author was employed by the institution at the time the output was first made publicly available.
- the research leading to the output was conducted during a period of eligible employment, even if the output was published after the contract ended.
- in exceptional cases, outputs authored by staff on teaching-only or other excluded contracts may be submitted, provided the institution can demonstrate that it directly enabled the research (e.g. through allocated time or funding). These cases must be documented in the Code of Practice and pre-cleared with the REF team.

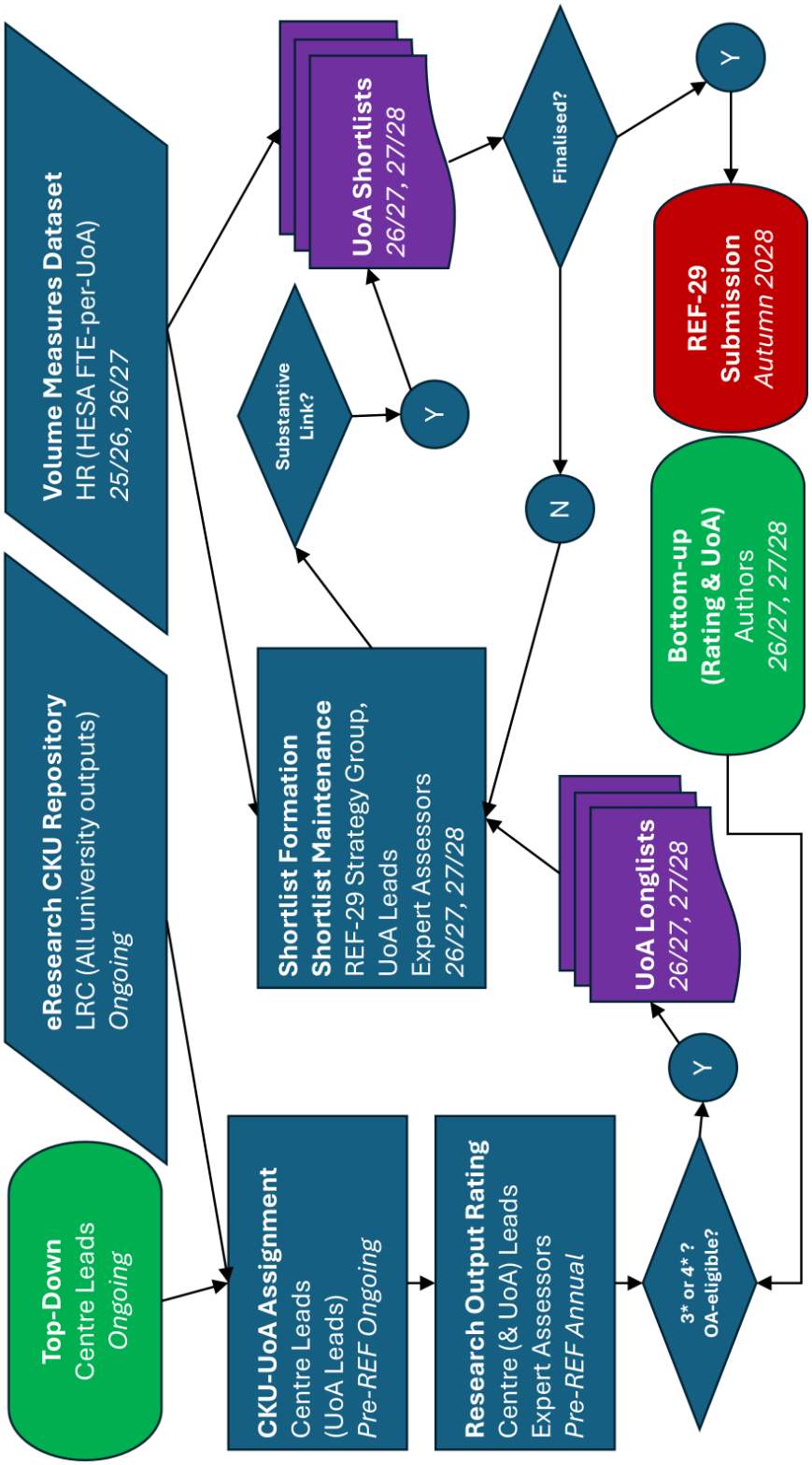
Eligibility of underpinning research activity

'Research produced by the submitting unit' means that staff carried out the underpinning research within the scope of the relevant UoA descriptor, while working in the submitting HEI (even if those staff have since left).

Scholarship

The creation, development and maintenance of the intellectual infrastructure of subjects and disciplines, in forms such as dictionaries, scholarly editions, catalogues and contributions to major research databases.

APPENDIX 3. OUTPUT (CKU) SELECTION FLOWCHART



APPENDIX 4. KEY DATES

Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU)

- Output Census Period - 1 January 2021 – 31 December 2028.
- Output must be first made publicly available during this period (note exceptions).

Volume Measures

- Volume Measure Period - AY 2025–26 and 2026–27 [note: AY 2024-25 was a pilot year.]
- Average FTE of eligible contracts is used to calculate the Volume Measure and number of outputs required.

Impact and Engagement (I&E)

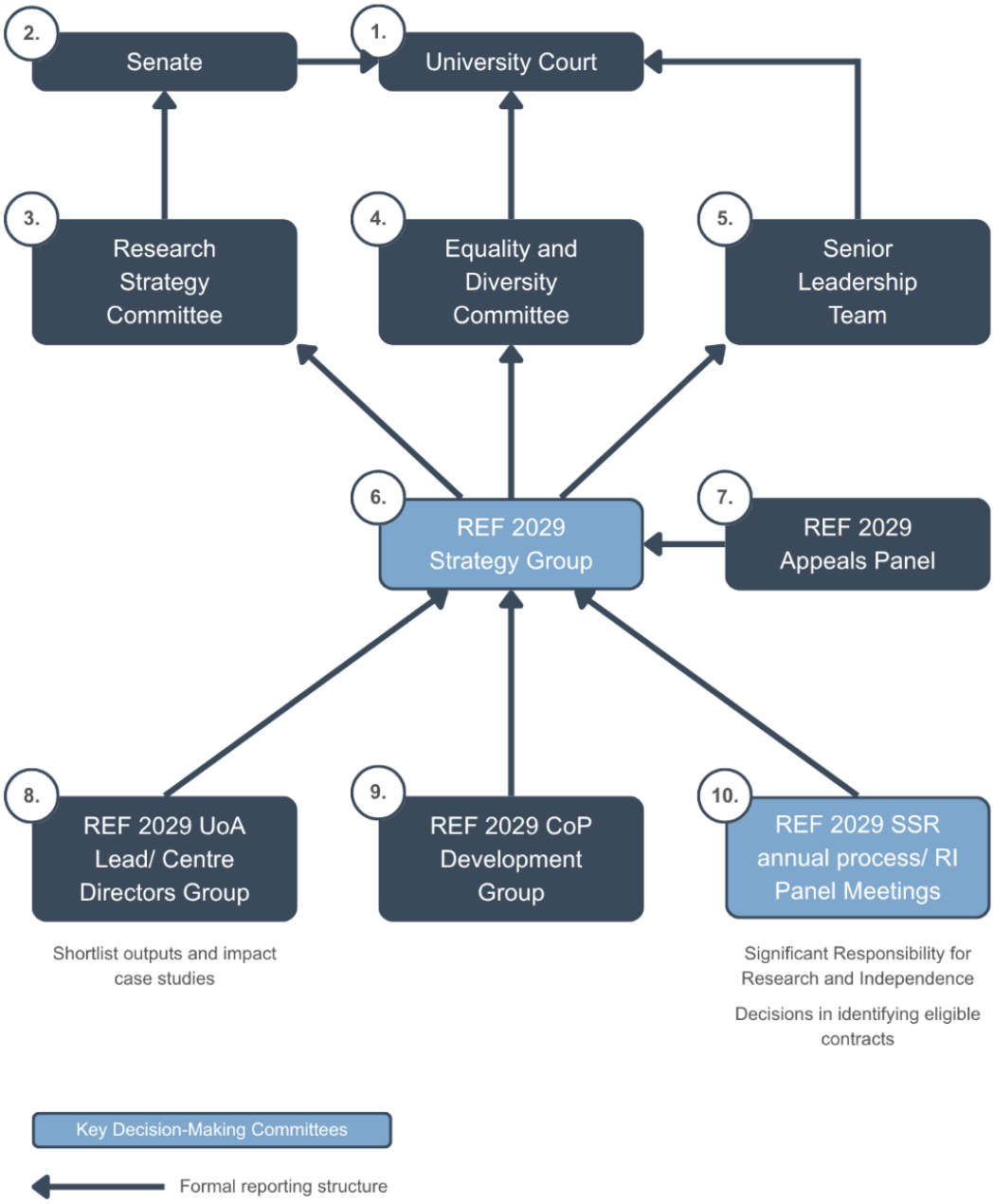
- Impact Census Period - 1 August 2020 to 31 July 2028.
- The core timeframe where evidence of impact must occur.

REF 2029 Submission

Submission Deadline - Autumn 2028.

APPENDIX 5. MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE, WITH ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

REF 2029 Committees Management Structure



REF 2029
Research Excellence Framework

Responsibilities of Project Committees, Groups and Individuals

Role	Responsibilities
1 University Court	• Responsible for carrying out the objectives of the university, ensuring the financial sustainability of the university and approving the strategic plan.
2 Senate	• Maintains the academic standards of the University. • Approves the final submission of the REF 2029 CoP.
3 Research Strategy Committee	• Receives updates from the REF 2029 Strategy Group. • Sets the strategic framework for research and knowledge exchange across the University.
4 Equality and Diversity Committee	• Sets the strategic framework for equality in service provision and in employment across the University. • Oversees EIAs for REF 2029.
5 Senior Leadership Team (SLT)	• Approves the final submission to REF 2029. • Advise on matters relating to HR policy and finance.
6 REF 2029 Strategy Group	• To receive, consider and make decisions on Impact Case Studies and Outputs. • Oversee the strategic development and management of the University's submission. • Implement the Code of Practice.
7 REF 2029 Appeals Panel	• To receive, consider and make decisions on all requests for appeals.
8 REF 2029 UoA Lead/ Centre Directors Group	• Make recommendations on the quality and selection of outputs, Impact Cases, and advise on matters relating to Strategy, People and Research Environment.
9 REF 2029 EDI CoP Development Group	• Develop and submit the Code of Practice. • Monitor and respond to consultation on the CoP. • Complete EIAs to support development of the CoP.

10 REF 2029 SRR annual process/ RI Panel Meetings	• Apply criteria and identify staff with SRR and RI. • Allocate eligible contracts to UoAs with the support of the Deans.

Role	Responsibilities
REF 2029 Academic Lead	• Jointly oversees the institutional process for determining SRR and RI.
QMU REF 2029 Associate Academic Lead – Women In Research Champion	• Shadow and support the REF 2029 Academic Lead in the strategic development of selected aspects of the QMU submission to REF 2029 including the development of the REF 2029 CoP. • Lead on QMU women research initiatives to EDI in our submission to REF 2029. • Input to and advise on QMU REF 2029 contextualized training and EIAs. • Work with RKEDU to provide academic input and steer in responding to external REF 2029 consultations and directives. • Provide perspective and review and support collegiality in ensuring a positive and healthy research culture.
Human Resources (HR)	• Jointly oversees the institutional process for determining SRR and RI and maintain contract data within iTrent. • Ensure individuals involved in the annual review cycle complete EDI training.
Research and Knowledge Exchange Development Unit (RKEDU)	• Provide advice and guidance on the application of REF guidance and procedures. • Ensure integration of SRR and RI determination with REF preparation activities.
Heads of Division (HoD)	• Ensures AWAM is completed in line with institutional set timescales. • Ensure AWAM information is recorded accurately and

	updated. • Confirm accuracy of workload allocations and alignment with divisional structures.
School Deans	• Ensures AWAM is completed across their School in line with set timelines. • Sign off SRR determination for staff in their School. • Oversee REF 2029 submission for UoAs which fall under their School in respect of ICS, and SPRE.
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Adviser	• Supports completion of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs). • Ensures the REF 2029 CoP processes remain fair, inclusive and non-discriminatory.
REF 2029 UoA Lead	• Lead and co-ordinate UoA Level submissions
Research and Knowledge Exchange Centre Director	• Annual review of Research and KE Centre membership and input to iTrent. • Staff annual 3-year plans. • Initial review of research outputs for REF 2029 long-list

REF 2029
Research Excellence Framework

APPENDIX 6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT – APPROVED BY EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY COMMITTEE MAY 8 2026

Queen Margaret University
EDINBURGH

Section 1: Key Information

Name of policy, practice or project	REF 2029 Code of Practice
Provide a summary of what the policy, practice or project is trying to achieve	The REF 2029 Code of Practice (CoP) sets out the institutional framework for ensuring that decisions related to our REF 2029 submission are robust, transparent, equitable, and inclusive. In line with REF 2029 Guidance and the requirements of the four UK higher education funding bodies, the CoP outlines QMU's processes for: • Identifying staff with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR). • Determining Research Independence (RI). • Allocating eligible contracts to UoAs • Selecting outputs (including identifying substantive link, allocating outputs to UoA and ensuring that submissions are representative).
Reason for EqIA	New policy, practice or project ☒ Change to existing policy, practice or project ☐
Who does this policy, practice or function effect?	Employees ☒ Students ☐ Applicants ☐ Members of the public ☐ Other ☐

REF 2029
Research Excellence Framework

Person leading the EqIA	REF 2029 Academic Lead Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Adviser
Date EqIA commenced	22/04/2026
EqIA review date	22/04/2027
Authorising Sign-Off	Convener of the REF 2029 Strategy Group Convener of the Equality and Diversity Committee

Section 2: Due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty

Does the policy eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations?
Yes - the focus of the Code of Practice is to ensure that the university, in its preparations for REF2029, meets its equality and diversity obligations, and does not disadvantage any researchers with protected characteristics. Through the CoP, the University will ensure that processes and decisions do not have a differential negative impact on any groups of researchers' career progression, inclusion in REF, research opportunities, wellbeing or morale. The CoP has been designed to benefit all academics engaging with the research culture by not promoting actively or passively any unlawful discrimination. And, if there are identified groups who are judged to specifically benefit from any of the processes, we should attempt to spread the benefit to other groups more widely. This EIA informs the Code of Practice drafting, processes, finalisation and initial implementation. Future EIAs will also analyse data from draft submissions, output selections to help check for imbalances in the process. Final EIAs on the actual submissions to REF will be prepared in light of the final submission details. This EIA is timed to coincide with the final stages of preparation of the Code of Practice, prior to its submission on 15th May. At this stage in the process, this EIA will focus on potential impacts of the processes. At this stage we have no data from mock exercises to draw on, but have drawn on our staff demographic data, experience in academia, responses to our staff consultation on the REF 2029 Code of Practice, relevant legislation, training materials relevant to REF EIAs and the REF guidance. Separate, robust EIAs have been conducted on each individual process within the CoP. This overall EIA brings together the findings and impacts of each of the processes, aiding us to identify and mitigate any cumulative impacts of the CoP as a whole. Section 3 of this EIA details our assessment by protected characteristic, followed by Section 5 which details the mitigating actions we intend to put into place throughout the REF 2029 process to ensure we are eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations. In our assessment of impact by protected characteristic, we are mindful of the cumulative effect of impacts for those with intersectional identities. We recognise that researchers' experiences will often be shaped by compounding factors, rather than just one. Mitigating actions detailed often apply to reduce the risk to multiple protected characteristics, and, where possible, EIAs conducted throughout the REF processes will review data and experiences from an intersectional lens.

Section 3: Assessment of Impact by Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
Age	☒	☒	☐	**Data** In QMU's 2025 HESA submission, out of "REF eligible" staff: • 8.4% were aged 25-34 • 28.2% were aged 35-44 • 32.8% were aged 45-54 • 23.7% were aged 55-64 • 6.9% were aged 65+ We recognise that younger (under 35) and older (over 65) staff have the lowest representation across our research workforce. **Impacts identified for younger staff early-career researchers (more likely to be, but not necessarily, younger staff):** • Across all processes within our REF Code of Practice, there is a risk of indirect bias in decision-making processes which could impact younger staff and ECRs. • ECRs may lack experience of a full REF cycle and the processes which may be a disadvantage. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria* – potential positive impact: AWAM arrangements inform SRR, allowing for retrospective recognition of research activity. For ECRs, who may be more likely to have fragmented research career journeys due to the nature of many fixed-term research posts or temporary

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				experience of teaching-and research posts at QMU or other institutions, retrospective recognition of prior research activity provides a longer-term level of protection. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria* – potential positive impact: ECRs may be more likely to have fragmented research career journeys due to the nature of many fixed-term research posts or temporary experience of teaching-and research posts at QMU or other institutions. The persistent nature of the RI criteria increases the likelihood of their inclusion. • Young age is more likely to have a negative effect on gaining research independence, as they may be less likely to meet some aspects of RI criteria (e.g., holding fellowships, leading research groups). • *In relation to allocating UoAs:* ECRs may feel uncertain about their preferred UoA assignment(s) or uncomfortable with QMU's chosen assignment, particularly if they are unfamiliar with REF processes, or if their ECR or doctoral career stage aligns well with Units of Assessment that differ from those that QMU is opting to use. • *In relation to shortlisting and selecting Outputs:* ECRs and younger staff may lack confidence in self-rating 3*/4* outputs, and the stop-start nature of short-term contracts for ECRs may make it harder to evidence continuous employment for the substantive link.

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				Impacts identified for older staff: • Across all processes within our REF Code of Practice, there is a risk of indirect bias in decision-making processes which could impact older staff. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria* – potential positive impact: AWAM arrangements inform SRR, allowing for retrospective recognition of research activity. For older staff, who may be more likely to have fragmented research career journeys due to returns from career-breaks, retrospective recognition of prior research activity provides a longer-term level of protection. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria* – potential positive impact: older staff may be more likely to have fragmented research career journeys due to returns from career-breaks. The persistent nature of the RI criteria increases the likelihood of their inclusion. • *In relation to allocating UoAs*: Older staff may be more likely to have non-linear research pathways, complicating assignment. They may feel uncertain about their assignment if they have been through previous REF cycles and were involved with different UoAs in previous REF exercises at QMU or a different employer, or if their current research aligns well with multiple UoAs that QMU is using or relatively poorly with any specific UoA or research group.

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				• *In relation to shortlisting and selecting outputs:* Older staff may be more likely to have non-linear research pathways, which may also make it harder to evidence continuous employment for the substantive link. **Mitigations:** • Although the CoP ensures that decision-making relies on objective criteria rather than personal characteristics, it also mandates EDI/unconscious bias training for all those in decision-making roles within the CoP processes. • Targeted support is provided for early-career researchers to support them to achieve independent pathways, including training and development support delivered by RKEDU. QMU also encourages ECRs to engage with peers and sector networks through participation in sector initiatives such as the British Academy Early Career Researcher Network. • Annual EIAs have been built into all CoP processes to monitor the impact of processes by age regularly. • Staff are encouraged to discuss outcomes with their relevant Research and KE Centre Director, allowing opportunities for staff to understand the rationale of UOA choices at QMU and individual allocation. • QMU offers a variety of formats to share information of REF processes, including the provision of drop-in sessions for staff,

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				to ensure staff unfamiliar with processes have access to information and an opportunity to ask questions. • Rating calibration training to be delivered by REF Academic Lead to be offered to all research centres.
Disability	☒	☒	☐	**Data** In our 2025 HESA submission, out of REF eligible staff, 7.3% were disabled. Our data shows that QMU has made progress in increasing disability declarations since REF 2021, when disabled staff previously represented 2.6% of REF eligible staff. It is recognised, however, that 5% REF eligible staff remain 'unknown', and as such, the limitations of the robustness of this data must be considered with caution when drawing conclusions. **Impacts identified for disabled staff:** • Across all processes within our REF Code of Practice, there is a risk of indirect bias in decision-making processes which could impact disabled staff. • Across all processes within the CoP, there is a risk that disabled staff may experience accessibility barriers. Disabled staff may require the procedure in alternative formats, particularly where processes use REF-specific jargon. Disabled

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				staff may face barriers to the processes if reasonable adjustments are not offered and implemented effectively. • Potential positive impact – the procedures for the communication of decisions includes postal letters for staff absent from work, ensuring alternative communication methods consider staff on long-term sickness leave. • *In relation to SRR/RI Criteria*: potential positive impact: Grant applications and research leadership activities may be affected during periods of ill health, and as such disabled staff may be less likely to meet RI criteria if it relied solely on evidence of recent activity. The persistent nature of QMU's criteria increases the likelihood of their inclusion. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria* – potential positive impact: AWAM arrangements inform SRR, allowing for retrospective recognition of research activity. For disabled staff, who may be more likely to have fragmented research career journeys due to periods of ill health, retrospective recognition of prior research activity provides a longer-term level of protection. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria* – potential positive impact: if adjustments require reduction in working, proportionate adjustments can be applied knowing there is no set expectation of any staff member's contribution to the output pool. • *In relation to allocating UoAs*: Disabled staff who have had reduced research productivity due to ill health might be

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				concerned that they would be perceived as less strongly aligned to any particular UoA. Neurodivergent staff may be more likely to be concerned about their allocated UoA if the underlying logic or purpose behind the group-based decision is not well-communicated by QMU. • *In relation to shortlisting and selecting outputs:* Disabled staff may be more likely to have non-linear research pathways, which may make it harder to evidence continuous employment for the substantive link and the visibility of staff in bottom-up processes. Cultural or social marginalisation can reduce confidence in self-rating and academic visibility. **Mitigations:** • Although the CoP ensures that decision-making relies on objective criteria rather than personal characteristics, it also mandates EDI/unconscious bias training for all those in decision-making roles within the CoP processes. • Annual EIAs have been built into all CoP processes to monitor the impact of processes by disability regularly. • QMU offers a variety of formats to share information of REF processes, including the provision of drop-in sessions for staff, to ensure staff are provided with alternatives to accessing the information through the CoP and an opportunity to ask questions.

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				• Staff are encouraged to discuss rationale and seek clarification, allowing opportunities for staff to understand the rationale of their UoA allocation. Alternative modes of discussion, such as flexible meeting times or written summaries, should be offered to ensure disabled staff have equitable access to these conversations. • Targeted promotion of reasonable adjustments guidance to all REF-eligible staff and managers to ensure that disabled staff are accessing the support required throughout REF processes. • Rating calibration training to be delivered by REF Academic Lead to be offered to all research centres.
Gender Re-assignment	☒	☒	☐	**Data** In our 2025 HESA submission, there were no REF-eligible staff declarations of gender reassignment. However, the majority of staff under this protected characteristic were 'unknown'. It is recognised that currently, the data QMU holds for this protected characteristic is not robust enough to draw meaningful conclusions. **Impacts identified** • Across all processes within our REF Code of Practice, there is a risk of indirect bias in decision-making processes which could impact transgender and non-binary staff.

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				• Potential positive impact – the procedures for the communication of decisions includes postal letters for staff absent from work, ensuring alternative communication methods consider staff who may be on long-term leave due to their transition. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria* – potential positive impact: AWAM arrangements inform SRR, allowing for retrospective recognition of research activity. For transgender staff, who may be more likely to have fragmented research career journeys due to periods of absence during transition, retrospective recognition of prior research activity provides a longer-term level of protection. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria*: potential positive impact - Research activity may be affected during transition, and as such transgender staff may be less likely to meet RI criteria if it relied solely on evidence of recent activity. The persistent nature of QMU's criteria increases the likelihood of their inclusion. • *In relation to shortlisting and selecting outputs:* Trans and non-binary staff may be more likely to have non-linear research pathways, which may make it harder to evidence continuous employment for the substantive link and the visibility of staff in bottom-up processes. Cultural or social marginalisation can reduce confidence in self-rating and academic visibility.

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				• Although QMU currently has no staff who have declared the protected characteristic of gender re-assignment, it is acknowledged that if someone were to declare, there is a risk that systems could show inconsistencies in records after name or gender marker changes across the CoP processes. **Mitigations** • Although the CoP ensures that decision-making relies on objective criteria rather than personal characteristics, it also mandates EDI/unconscious bias training for all those in decision-making roles within the CoP processes. • Annual EIAs have been built into all CoP processes to monitor the impact of processes by gender re-assignment regularly. • Rating calibration training to be delivered by REF Academic Lead to be offered to all research centres. • Where declarations are made, ensure that iTrent data is updated accurately and sensitively.
Marriage and Civil Partnership	☐	☐	☒	**Impacts identified** • Across all processes within our REF Code of Practice, there is a risk of indirect bias in decision-making processes which could impact staff with different marriage and civil partnership status.

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				Mitigations • Although the CoP ensures that decision-making relies on objective criteria rather than personal characteristics, it also mandates EDI/unconscious bias training for all those in decision-making roles within the CoP processes. • Annual EIAs have been built into all CoP processes to monitor the impact of processes by marriage and civil partnership regularly.
Pregnancy and Maternity	☒	☒	☐	**Data** In our 2025 HESA submission, out of REF eligible staff, 3.4% of REF eligible staff had taken or were currently on maternity leave since REF 2021. **Impacts identified** • Across all processes within our REF Code of Practice, there is a risk of indirect bias in decision-making processes which could impact pregnant staff or staff returning from maternity leave. • Potential positive impact – the procedures for the communication of decisions includes postal letters for staff absent from work, ensuring alternative communication methods consider staff on maternity leave.

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				• *In relation to SRR/RI criteria* – potential positive impact: AWAM arrangements inform SRR, allowing for retrospective recognition of research activity. For staff on or returning from maternity leave, retrospective recognition of prior research activity provides a longer-term level of protection. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria* – potential positive impact: staff on or returning from maternity leave may not have current research activity. The persistent nature of the RI criteria increases the likelihood of their inclusion. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria* – potential positive impact: if adjustments require reduction in working, proportionate adjustments can be applied knowing there is no set expectation of any staff member's contribution to the output pool. • Informal research activities undertaken during leave periods might not be recognised depending on data sources. • *In relation to allocating UoAs*: staff returning from maternity leave may have shifted research focus, affecting perceived alignment of the individual to an allocated UoA. Staff going on or returning from or going on maternity leave may be concerned about the gaps in their outputs being misinterpreted. • *In relation to shortlisting and selecting outputs:* Gaps in outputs during pregnancy/maternity leave could affect visibility of staff in bottom-up processes. Cultural or social marginalisation can reduce confidence in self-rating and academic visibility.

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				Mitigations • Although the CoP ensures that decision-making relies on objective criteria rather than personal characteristics, it also mandates EDI/unconscious bias training for all those in decision-making roles within the CoP processes. • Annual EIAs have been built into all CoP processes to monitor the impact of processes by pregnancy and maternity regularly. • Staff are encouraged to discuss outcomes with their relevant Research and KE Centre Director, allowing opportunities for transparent rationale and discussion for staff on or returning from maternity leave. Alternative modes of discussion, such as flexible meeting times or written summaries, should be offered to ensure pregnant staff and staff on or returning from maternity leave have equitable access to these conversations. • Annual reviews of UoAs allows recognition of evolving research. UoA allocation is not based on the volume of researched or its perceived quality. • Rating calibration training to be delivered by REF Academic Lead to be offered to all research centres.
Race	☒	☒	☐	**Data** In our 2025 HESA submission, out of REF eligible staff, 10.3% were from a minority ethnic background. Our data shows that QMU has

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				made progress in increasing minority ethnic representation since REF 2021, when minority ethnic staff previously represented 6.8% of REF eligible staff. Due to small numbers, it is not possible to disaggregate further than the grouping of 'minority ethnic'. QMU recognises that this grouping can be problematic and mask important differences between groups. It is also recognised that 4.2% REF eligible staff remain 'unknown', and as such, the limitations of the robustness of this data must be considered with caution when drawing conclusions. **Impacts identified** • Across all processes within our REF Code of Practice, there is a risk of indirect bias in decision-making processes which could impact minority ethnic staff. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria:* evidence across the UK sector shows systemic inequities in research leadership opportunities, grant success rates, and mentorship for minority ethnic staff. "Independently won" or "lead applicant criteria may indirectly reproduce structural disadvantage. However, the procedure recognises multiple pathways to meeting RI criteria, increasing the likelihood of their inclusion. • *In relation to allocating UoAs:* across the sector, minority ethnic researchers can be disproportionately located in

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				interdisciplinary or emerging fields, which may map ambiguously onto UoAs. • *In relation to shortlisting and selecting outputs:* Minority ethnic researchers are more likely to hold precarious contracts or short-contract histories, increasing risk of failing substantive-link criteria. Cultural or social marginalisation can reduce confidence in self-rating and academic visibility. **Mitigations:** • Although the CoP ensures that decision-making relies on objective criteria rather than personal characteristics, it also mandates EDI/unconscious bias training for all those in decision-making roles within the CoP processes. • Annual EIAs have been built into all CoP processes to monitor the impact of processes by race regularly. • Staff are encouraged to discuss outcomes with their relevant Research and KE Centre Director, allowing opportunities for transparent rationale and discussion with staff. • Rating calibration training to be delivered by REF Academic Lead to be offered to all research centres. • QMU has a visible and strategic programme of institutional activity to promote anti-racism within academia, including

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				through our EDI Culture Review, EDI and Anti-Racism Strategy 2023-2028, and our Equality Outcomes 2025-2029.
Religion and Belief	☒	☒	☐	**Data** In our 2025 HESA submission, out of REF eligible staff, 35.5% had a religious belief, whilst 32.1% did not have a religion. Due to small numbers, it is not possible to disaggregate by religion. A large proportion (32.4%) staff under this protected characteristic were 'unknown'. It is recognised that currently, the data QMU holds for this protected characteristic is not robust enough to draw meaningful conclusions. **Impacts identified** • Across all processes within our REF Code of Practice, there is a risk of indirect bias in decision-making processes which could impact staff of different religions and beliefs. • Staff observing religious calendars may have different availability to attend various activities in CoP processes. • *In relation to shortlisting and selecting outputs:* Cultural or social marginalisation can reduce confidence in self-rating and academic visibility.

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				Mitigations • Although the CoP ensures that decision-making relies on objective criteria rather than personal characteristics, it also mandates EDI/unconscious bias training for all those in decision-making roles within the CoP processes. • Annual EIAs have been built into all CoP processes to monitor the impact of processes by religion or belief regularly. • Rating calibration training to be delivered by REF Academic Lead to be offered to all research centres. • Alternative modes of attendance to REF activities, such as flexible meeting times or written summaries, should be offered to ensure staff observing religious dates have equitable access to REF processes.
Sex	☒	☒	☐	**Data** In our 2025 HESA submission, out of REF eligible staff, 73.7% were women and 26.3% were men. This proportion is in line with QMU's overall gender split in its staff and student populations. **Impacts identified**

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				• Across all processes within our REF Code of Practice, there is a risk of indirect bias in decision-making processes which could impact women or men. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria:* Women in academia are statistically more likely to have higher teaching/administration loads and fewer opportunities for grant leadership, which may lead to fewer RI indicators. QMU is not immune to this risk – our REF 2021 submission showed evidence of gendered bias. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria* – potential positive impact: AWAM arrangements inform SRR, allowing for retrospective recognition of research activity. For women, who may be more likely to have fragmented research career journeys due to caring responsibilities, part-time work, pregnancy and maternity etc, retrospective recognition of prior research activity provides a longer-term level of protection. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria* – potential positive impact: women may be more likely to have non-linear research pathways due to caring responsibilities, part-time work, pregnancy and maternity and so on. The persistent nature of the RI criteria increases the likelihood of their inclusion. • *In relation to allocating UoAs:* women are over-represented in some disciplines and under-represented in others, which could influence perceptions of fit. Interruptions due to caring

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				responsibilities may influence perceived research thematic clarity. • *In relation to shortlisting and selecting outputs:* Career interruptions due to maternity leave, caring responsibilities or part time working may reduce likelihood of authors feeling confident to rate outputs as 3*/4. Cultural or social marginalisation can reduce confidence in self-rating and academic visibility. • There is a likelihood of intersecting risks for women – age, maternity leave, caring responsibilities, part-time working etc – all contribute in an intersecting and compounding nature to the overall risk of women in research. **Mitigations** • Although the CoP ensures that decision-making relies on objective criteria rather than personal characteristics, it also mandates EDI/unconscious bias training for all those in decision-making roles within the CoP processes. • Annual EIAs have been built into all CoP processes to monitor the impact of processes by sex. Where possible, intersecting impacts will be monitored.

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				• Introduction of QMU's 'Women in Research Champion' role to redress the underrepresentation of women in QMU's REF 2021 submission. • QMU offers a variety of formats to share information of REF processes, including the provision of drop-in sessions for staff, to ensure staff are provided with alternatives to accessing the information through the CoP and an opportunity to ask questions. • Staff are encouraged to discuss rationale and seek clarification, allowing opportunities for staff to understand the rationale of their UoA allocation. Alternative modes of discussion, such as flexible meeting times or written summaries, should be offered to ensure women, who are more likely to work part-time/flexibly, have equitable access to these conversations. • Rating calibration training to be delivered by REF Academic Lead to be offered to all research centres. • QMU has a visible and strategic programme of institutional activity to promote gender equality within academia, including through our participation in the Athena Swan Charter and Aurora Scheme and our Equality Outcomes 2025-2029.
Sexual Orientation	☐	☒	☐	**Data** In our 2025 HESA submission, out of REF eligible staff, 8.4% were

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				LGBTQ+. A large proportion (32.4%) staff under this protected characteristic were 'unknown'. It is recognised that currently, the data QMU holds for this protected characteristic is not robust enough to draw meaningful conclusions. **Impacts identified** • Across all processes within our REF Code of Practice, there is a risk of indirect bias in decision-making processes which could impact LGBTQ+ staff. • *In relation to shortlisting and selecting outputs:* Cultural or social marginalisation can reduce confidence in self-rating and academic visibility. **Mitigations** • Although the CoP ensures that decision-making relies on objective criteria rather than personal characteristics, it also mandates EDI/unconscious bias training for all those in decision-making roles within the CoP processes. • Annual EIAs have been built into all CoP processes to monitor the impact of processes by sexual orientation. • Rating calibration training to be delivered by REF Academic Lead to be offered to all research centres.

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
Other *e.g. caring responsibilities, care-experienced or estranged, contractual status, TU membership, BSL users, refugees & asylum seekers, different socio-economic backgrounds*	☒	☒	☐	**1 – Part-time staff** **Data** In our 2025 HESA submission, out of REF eligible staff, 44% work part-time, and 56% work full-time. **Impacts identified** • Across all processes within our REF Code of Practice, there is a risk of indirect bias in decision-making processes which could impact part-time staff. • Across all processes within our REF Code of Practice, there is a risk that decision notifications and appeal windows may fall on non-working days, reducing the effective time available to respond. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria*: There is a risk that part-time staff may not receive research time proportionate to their FTE in their AWAM, particularly if teaching responsibilities are prioritised. Research leadership opportunities can often assume full-time availability, limiting opportunities for part-time researchers.

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				• *In relation to allocating UoAs*: Part-time staff may have reduced visibility within Research and KE Centres due to fewer contracted hours, which could affect how clearly their research alignment is understood. Their research activity may progress over a longer timescale, which could lead to misinterpretation of research focus or continuity. • *In relation to shortlisting and selecting outputs*: there is a risk that part-time researchers will have reduced academic visibility. **2- Fixed-term staff** **Data** In our 2025 HESA submission, out of REF eligible staff, 10.7% were on fixed-term contracts, and 89.3% were on permanent contracts. **Impacts identified** • Across all processes within our REF Code of Practice, there is a risk of indirect bias in decision-making processes which could impact fixed-term staff. • If communications about CoP processes are not well-timed or accessible, fixed-term staff may miss opportunities to engage. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria*: Fixed-term researchers often join projects that limit opportunities to lead grants or supervise teams, reducing ability to meet RI criteria. Fixed-term staff may

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				join after AWAM deadlines or occupy short roles that do not align with annual SRR/RI review cycles. Lack of SRR or RI recognition can disadvantage fixed-term staff in seeking open-ended roles or demonstrating research independence for future appointments. • *In relation to allocating UoAs:* Staff on fixed-term contracts may have shorter periods of affiliation with Research and KE Centres, which can affect how well their research alignment is understood by decision-makers, particularly if they have research independence due to having a personal research fellowship rather than being part of a larger research team. The temporary nature of their roles may lead to assumptions about the stability or longevity of their research themes, which could influence perceptions of UoA fit. • *In relation to shortlisting and selecting outputs:* there is a risk that fixed-term researchers will have reduced academic visibility which may impact the shortlisting processes. **3 – Staff with caring responsibilities** **Impacts Identified** • Across all processes within our REF Code of Practice, there is a risk of indirect bias in decision-making processes which could impact staff with caring responsibilities.

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				• If communications about CoP processes are not well timed or accessible, staff with caring responsibilities may miss opportunities to engage. • Caring responsibilities may influence the pace, visibility, or continuity of research activity, which could lead to misconceptions about the staff member's research focus or disciplinary identity and academic visibility. • *In relation to SRR/RI criteria* – potential positive impact: AWAM arrangements inform SRR, allowing for retrospective recognition of research activity. For staff with caring responsibilities, retrospective recognition of prior research activity provides a longer-term level of protection. • *In relation to SRR/RI Criteria*: Staff with caring duties may be given heavier or more predictable teaching loads, reducing AWAM allocated research time and therefore SRR eligibility. However, RI status is persistent, preventing loss of independence due to temporary caring commitments. **Mitigations** • Although the CoP ensures that decision-making relies on objective criteria rather than personal characteristics, it also mandates EDI/unconscious bias training for all those in decision-making roles within the CoP processes.

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				• Annual EIAs have been built into all CoP processes to monitor the impact of processes for staff on part-time or fixed-term contracts or with caring responsibilities. • Alternative modes of discussion, such as flexible meeting times or written summaries, should be offered to ensure all staff have equitable access to opportunities relating to the CoP processes. • AWAM guidance documents provides staff and Heads of Division with clear guidance on ensuring time is proportionally allocated to part-time staff. • New members of staff on Teaching and Research contracts will have their SRR status determined within the first four weeks of employment, as part of the induction process led by their line manager. • Annual review of allocations provides the opportunity to recognise how research evolves when caring responsibilities change, ensuring that decisions remain fair and reflective of current academic work. • Existing institutional support such as enhanced special leave policies, flexible working options, and tailored support, development opportunities and training for researchers through RKEDU. **4 – British Sign Language and other recognised languages** The Code of Practice ensures that research and research output

Protected Characteristic	Impact: Positive	Impact: Negative	Impact: None / Neutral	Details of identified impact(s)
				will be assessed as CKU on an equal basis. In line with the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 and the commitments set out in our British Sign Language Plan 2024-2030, the equal treatment of outputs includes outputs in British Sign Language and extends to other recognised languages (namely Scottish Gaelic, Scots, Ulster Scots, Irish, and Irish Sign Language), which the University affirms will not be treated less favourably than those in English in the output selection process.

REF2029
Research Excellence Framework

Section 4: Equality Impact Assessment Rating and Outcome

Select a recommended rating and course of action. Further information on each of the outcomes can be found on Page 8 of the EqIA Toolkit.

Green: No change required	☐
Amber: Adjust the policy, practice or project or introduce mitigating actions.	☒
Red/Amber: Continue with the policy, practice or project and objectively justify the risk for negative impact.*	☐
Red: Stop the policy, practice or project.	☐

***If outcome is Red/Amber, evidence the reasoning behind your decision below**
Click or tap here to enter text.

Section 5: Action Planning

As a result of performing this analysis, what actions are proposed to remove or reduce any risks of adverse outcomes identified on protected characteristic groups?

Identified Risk	Recommended Actions	Responsible Lead	Completion Date	Review Date
All – gaps in staff equalities data reduces the ability to draw meaningful conclusions from data analysis by protected characteristic	Throughout REF2029, conduct regular campaigns to encourage staff to declare their protected characteristics data, providing information on how it is used and confidentiality assurances.	Senior HR Partner, EDI Adviser	Annually with HESA Return	Ongoing

All - Data on process outcomes will need to be monitored to ensure the criteria is not disproportionately affecting any groups.	Conduct an annual EIA of outcomes data for each of the processes to monitor outcomes by protected characteristic. Where possible, review data with an intersectional lens.	REF Strategy Group, EDI Adviser, HR Systems & Data Partner	Annually throughout REF 2029	Ongoing
All – Although the procedures in the CoP provide objective criteria, there is a risk that indirect bias may occur in decision-making.	Ensure that all decision makers in the process undertake EDI/unconscious bias training. REF/EDI specific training, such as rating calibration training, to be offered to all those involved in processes.	REF Strategy Group REF Academic Lead	Ongoing throughout REF 2029	Annually
Sex – there was evidence of gendered bias in QMU's REF 2021 submission and a number of potential risks to women in the CoP processes.	Ensure the role of Women in Research Champion is consulted and integrated throughout the REF2029 process. Continue to promote gender equality within research and academia, including through our participation in the Athena Swan Charter and Aurora Scheme and our Equality Outcomes 2025-2029.	REF Strategy Group Equality and Diversity Committee; Athena Swan SAT; Aurora Network	Ongoing throughout REF 2029	Annually
Race - systemic inequities across the sector exist for minority ethnic researchers	Continue to progress and promote anti-racist practice through QMU's EDI Culture Review, EDI and Anti-Racism Strategy 2023-2028, and our Equality Outcomes 2025-2029.	Race Equality Steering Group; Equality and Diversity Committee	Ongoing throughout REF 2029	Annually

Disability, contractual status, caring responsibilities, religion/belief, pregnancy and maternity - staff may require the CoP, opportunities or feedback discussions in alternative formats.	Continue to provide a range of alternative formats for sharing information about REF processes, including the provision of drop-in sessions. Ensure Centre Directors offer alternative modes of discussing allocations with staff, such as flexible meeting times or written summaries Centre Directors to ensure that fixed-term staff (especially research staff on personal projects) receive timely, proactive communication. Promotion of existing institutional support such as enhanced special leave policies, flexible working options, and tailored support, development opportunities and training for researchers through RKEDU.	REF 2029 Academic Lead, Women in Research Champion, RKEDU Centre Directors Centre Directors HR, RKEDU	Ongoing throughout REF 2029	Annually
Disability – staff may require reasonable adjustments to engage in REF processes, and managers making decisions should not make assumptions about capacity.	Conduct a targeted promotion of reasonable adjustments guidance to all REF-eligible staff and managers involved to ensure that disabled staff are accessing the support they require.	HR Partners		

Age and contract type – early career, part-time and fixed-term researchers may be less likely to have achieved SRR/RI criteria.	Continue to provide targeted support and development opportunities for ECRs. Continue to embed and progress actions set out in our Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2022 – 2027. Progress actions set out in our Research Governance and Culture Action Plan 2026–2030.	RKEDU	Ongoing throughout REF 2029	Annually
British Sign Language (BSL) and other recognised languages - outputs in British Sign Language (BSL) and other recognised languages should not treated less favourably than those in English, in accordance with the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015	Continue to embed and progress actions set out in our British Sign Language Plan 2024 – 2030, Outputs in BSL or recognised languages to be treated equally to those in English in Output Shortlisting and Selection processes	Equality and Diversity Committee REF Strategy Group	Ongoing throughout REF 2029	Annually

Section 6: Sign-off and Publication

Authorising sign-off	Sign-off date
Convener of the REF 2029 Strategy Group Convener of the Equality and Diversity Committee	11/05/2026