

LJMU Code of Practice for the Second Research Excellence Framework (REF; REF2021)

All institutions intending to make a submission to REF2021 have developed and are implementing a code of practice on the fair and transparent identification of staff and outputs. The funding bodies provided institutions with [guidance](#) to help ensure that codes and the associated practices they embody are lawful and in accordance with LJMU's duties under the Equality Act 2010.

This code of practice has been developed by a working group Chaired by the University's Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research & Enterprise, with representation from each faculty and Human Resources. It incorporates feedback from the LJMU staff community received during a month-long consultation period (9th April through to 6th May 2019) and was approved by Research England following review by the REF Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel (EDAP).

The University's submission to REF2021 will include research of the very highest quality, reflecting LJMU's strategy to support and develop targeted areas of world-leading research. However, it is important to recognise that research is just one element of the University's strategic framework, and not all staff are expected to engage in research at the level commensurate with institutional expectations regarding research excellence. This code communicates both the University's expectations of staff who are actively engaged in research, and how contributions to REF2021 will be managed.

This code of practice is a working document and is being updated into 2020 to reflect changes to any implementation plans and activities, as approved by the CPWG.

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Part 1: Introduction

Introduction and the institutional context

1. This code of practice purposefully frames the University's decision-making processes in relation to REF2021 in the context of the principles of equality and diversity and all relevant legislation. It sets-out the University's approach to:

- a) the fair and transparent identification of staff with significant responsibility for research
- b) determining who is an independent researcher, and
- c) the selection of research outputs (including support for staff with circumstances that have constrained their ability to work productively over the REF¹ assessment period)

2. The REF2021 [eligibility criteria](#)² as defined by Research England (and set-out in paragraph 49) are paramount to this code of practice. But also central to it are specific institutional and culture-enhancing initiatives, including the University's Research and Scholarship Strategy and Human Resources (HR) Strategy. The code draws upon existing policies and practices that support and promote equality and diversity at LJMU including our Equality & Diversity Policy, activities in relation to Athena SWAN, and the Race Charter. It also references actions that facilitate the development and progression of academic staff, for example our commitment to the Researcher Development Concordat , and the role of our various staff networks in communicating and embedding this code of practice. These are highlighted in sections below where relevant.

3. The University's Strategic Framework 2017-22 is illustrative of the broad portfolio of activities academic staff engage in, many of which are generally distinct from research (enhancing the student experience, civic and external engagement, teaching). Therefore, not all staff are expected to, or can engage in research at the level commensurate with institutional expectations regarding research excellence. This most certainly does not diminish the value placed by the University on activities such as leading professional development programmes, growing industrial relationships, developing and enhancing curricular for example. However, in relation to REF2021, the University will only return staff who meet the inclusion criterion set-out in paragraphs 16 to 21.

4. In the context of the previous REF (REF2014), the University reported its equality impact assessment and has since reacted to the positive actions set-out in that report in the following ways:

- By providing dedicated support for female members of staff with ambitions to achieve internal promotion to Reader or Professor (the Women Professors Network, Women Readers Network and Women Early Career Researcher (ECR) Network have been especially proactive here)

¹ A list of abbreviations used in this document is provided in Appendix A

² See Part 3, Section 1 of the Guidance on Submissions issued by Research England

- By encouraging female academics to participate in the Aurora Programme
- Initiating a research-focused mentorship scheme in 2018 for staff on the cusp of being research-active (regardless of stage of career)
- By encouraging staff declaration of protected characteristics
- Since 2014, by taking individual staff circumstances into consideration as part of the promotion criteria for Reader and Professorial conferment

5. The content of this document and the practical implementation of the code of practice going forward, demonstrate that the University's preparations for REF2021 are transparent, consistent, accountable and inclusive. Further details are provided below.

Transparency

6. This code of practice has a multi-phased programme of communications surrounding it. During Phase 1 (consultation):

- All academic staff received email correspondence from the PVC for Scholarship, Research & Knowledge Transfer on 11 April 2019 outlining the processes for a), b) and c) above and inviting comments on the draft code of practice to be sent to REF2021@ljmu.ac.uk by 6th May 2019
- Three briefing events were hosted by the PVC for Research & Enterprise across the University's campuses on the 10th and 11th April 2019 which detailed the content of the draft code and explained the related processes
- The draft code of practice has been available as a downloadable PDF on the staff intranet (dedicated REF2021 pages) since the 9th April, and related content featured in a newsletter (Research & Innovation Services) issued on 18th April 2019
- The draft code of practice was communicated to the following committees and groups with the request that it be discussed as a formal agenda item during any meetings between 9th April and 6th May 2019. Comments could be sent to REF2021@ljmu.ac.uk:
 - Faculty Research & Knowledge Exchange committees (5)*
 - LJMU Athena SWAN Working Group
 - LJMU Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic Staff Network
 - LJMU Branch of the University and College Union*
 - LJMU Concordat Task Group and Concordat Forum
 - LJMU Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity Committee
 - LJMU Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Staff Network*
 - LJMU Race Equality Charter Working Group
 - LJMU Staff Disability Network*
 - LJMU Women Professors Network
 - LJMU Women Readers Network
 - LJMU Women ECR Network

7. A letter was sent by HR personnel to the home address of academic staff who were absent from the University³ during the consultation period. The letter directed staff to the REF2021 pages of the University's staff intranet where the draft code of practice was available to view and download.

8. Feedback on the draft code was received by sixteen individuals or collectives, including *committees/groups (paragraph 6). Responses were formally considered by the University's Code of Practice Working Group on 10th May 2019 with recommendations that the draft code be amended in the following ways:

- To make more explicit, which stipulations stem from Research England, as opposed to those that are determined by the University
- To provide greater clarity and specific detail regarding the appeals process
- To enhance communications about the implementation of the code of practice including sustained engagement with the committees and groups listed under paragraph 6 above
- To place greater emphasis on the centrality of the University's research institutes and centres in the process of identifying staff with significant responsibility for research
- To provide further information that signifies rigor in the process of identifying staff with significant responsibility for research

Additionally, a number of paragraphs have been edited to reflect very specific and helpful comments or suggestions from within the consultation responses.

9. The University submitted its code of practice to Research England for approval by midday on the 7th June 2019. The staff [intranet](#) makes the most current version (PDF) of the code available (thereby taking into account any changes required by Research England following review). Large print versions of the document can be provided (contact REF2021@ljmu.ac.uk). Staff news stories will communicate to staff when the code is updated and the nature of changes made. The University has made its approved code publically available as required by Research England.

10. Phase 2 of the communications plan (from the 17th June 2019) has focused more specifically on raising awareness of the process to enable staff to voluntarily declare individual circumstances. This is being led by the University's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Manager, and is detailed in Part 4 of this document. Additional advocacy will target research-only colleagues to encourage engagement with the process to establish if staff meet the criteria as independent researchers (Part 3 of this code).

11. A third phase of communications will brief academic staff in January 2020 of the University's submission intentions for REF2021. This provides an opportunity to also refresh awareness of the declaration processes in place for staff circumstances (as detailed in Part 4 of this document).

³ Long-term absence (more than 28 calendar days with no return indicated)

Consistency

12. The processes relating to a), b) and c) above are applied in a consistent manner across the University: for a) the Terms of Reference (ToR) for faculty decision-making appear in Appendix B of this code of practice; the process for determining research independence b) is managed centrally, by the Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy using a standard set of questions (Part 3 of this document) to elicit evidence against indicators of independence (according to the Main Panels in the [Panel Criteria and Working Methods](#); outputs selection c) is overseen by the University Research & Knowledge Exchange Committee, and informed by a transparent process of output quality assessment conducted at unit of assessment level (UOA) (Part 4).

Accountability

13. The individuals and groups/committees with responsibilities for advising or making decisions regarding the processes a), b) and c) are listed in Appendix C, these include:

- The University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (ToR are shown in Appendix D)
- Faculty Academic Staff Research Status Panels (Appendix B)
- LJMU's Code of Practice Working Group (see Appendix E for the ToR)

All individuals (roles) and members of the groups/committees listed received REF2021 equality training (May, June or July 2019). The mandatory training was delivered by the University's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Manager together with the Head of Research Excellence and Research Strategy) with content including:

- an explanation of why equality and diversity are important in the context of REF, and to give the legal background
- a description of circumstances where equality issues can be taken into account when considering individual staff research outputs
- signposting staff to more detailed information about equality and diversity in the REF process
- unconscious/conscious bias as related to REF2021

An indicative schedule for the training is provided in Appendix F. The training materials are available on the staff [intranet](#) for wider consumption.

Inclusivity

14. The University returned just 26% of eligible staff to REF2014⁴ and anticipates a submission of more than double this proportion in REF2021. As set-out below, the reworked institutional approach is reflective, inclusive and aims to normalise the relationship staff have with the REF. The University is committed to ensuring that the excellent research of eligible staff across all protected characteristics, and regardless of part-time or fixed-term working arrangements, is included.

Part 2: LJMU's approach to identifying staff with significant responsibility for conducting research on an independent basis

Strategic approach

15. The designation of a University Research Institute or Research Centre is an institutional acknowledgement of the quality in research programmes and activities within a discipline. The criteria associated with establishing an institute or centre are primarily related to: (a) the overall quality of research and related activities, and (b) the delivery of a sustainable and vibrant research environment in which research is conducted (Appendix G). The University's Research and Scholarship Strategy 2017-22 includes a related key performance indicator to grow the number of institute entities over the period.

16. The University's approach to identifying staff with significant responsibility for research is centered upon staff membership of University-conferred research institutes and centres (and in some instances 'groups' in areas with less evolved research cultures). Core (or 'full') membership is confirmed when academic staff:

"Demonstrate proven research capability to (on a consistent and independent basis) conduct and disseminate rigorous research that clearly advances knowledge in their field/sub-field".

Staff may be core members of more than one institute or centre as appropriate to the disciplinary coverage of the entity (see Appendix H).

17. The above institutional expectation (paragraph 16) also emphasises that the University is placing particular significance on 'independence' as a feature of core membership. This is to recognise that a volume of eligible academic staff within the University are conducting doctoral research and/or participating in the University's research mentoring scheme⁵ and as such are generally not independent researchers. These staff are 'associate' members of a centre/institute, and are not deemed to have significant responsibility for research. Likewise, academic staff who are new to the University and have been identified as

⁴ REF2014 permitted universities to 'select' staff for inclusion, with a general output requirement of four outputs per person; REF2021 requires universities to return all staff with 'significant responsibility for research', with a minimum of one and up to five outputs per person.

⁵ Key performance indicators within the University's Research and Scholarship Strategy 2017-22 relate to increasing staff engagement with research and scholarship and the proportion of doctoral-qualified academics. The interests and actions of the University's Researcher Development Concordat Steering Group are also indicative that LJMU is striving to support the career development of all academic staff (not just contract researchers).

requiring support to develop or embed their research within LJMU, may have associate member status. Such staff typically join the University directly from practitioner/professional roles (e.g. solicitors, health professionals, teachers) or from the digital and creative sectors.

18. Core membership of a research institute/centre/group denotes a member of staff as having significant responsibility for research. However, this code of practice hereon refers to core members having significant responsibility for conducting independent research (SRIR). Please refer to Part 3, paragraph 50 for the definition of research independence; indicators are inherent within paragraph 52.

19. The University issues a standard academic contract to its body of academic staff (teaching and research). However, as indicated on page 1 and paragraph 3, employment expectations, as communicated and agreed at an individual level, do vary across the University. Staff engagement in other activities, including developing partnerships that lead to CPD development for example, are just as valuable to the University as REF-focused research. Paragraph 17 also highlights that independence is key to SRIR evidenced by a number of indicators, not just outputs. Therefore, employment expectations (as separate from contractual status), drive decisions on SRIR. The university affirms that the REF is a collective measure of research excellence and does not consider that inclusion or not of an individual within the REF submission pool, as defined by this code of practice, is a criterion for management of performance. Any management of an individual's performance is unchanged by the code of practice.

Process

20. The process for identifying core members of research institutes/centres/groups (staff with SRIR) was formally implemented between March and July 2019. It builds on pilot activity in 2017/18 that considered which indicators could best/reliably be used to underpin decisions around SRIR and member status.

21. The institutional expectation is that in meeting the definition in paragraph 16, academic staff routinely produce two or more research outputs deemed to be of quality that is at least recognised internationally over a four-year rolling period⁶ (pro-rata for <1.0 FTE staff). The volume measure encompasses disciplinary differences in the length of time it may take for staff to undertake research and develop different types of output. Indicators of research independence are also collated. Collectively, these indicators are met by the majority of academic staff within the University.

Implementation

⁶ The four-year rolling period reflects the institutional strategy for research quality expectations and improvement in general (over time), as opposed to aligning with a REF cycle which would have a defined cut-off point.

22. The process is conducted annually and is overseen by LJMU's Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research & Enterprise and the University's Head of Research Excellence and Research Strategy to establish consistent application of the approach across the University. The pilot iteration of the process identified both good practices and areas where local implementation of the process could be improved upon (consistency). This was established during a process review (conducted in December 2018) which has informed the current implementation plan detailed below.

23. The Associate Dean for Research (AD-R) initiates a data compilation exercise to collate information about:

- i. Individual staff employed within the previous 12 months (name; start date at LJMU; FTE)
- ii. Research outputs produced over the last rolling four year period
- iii. Research alignment to University-conferred research institute/centre/group
- iv. Grant application activity over the last four year period
- v. External income generation over the last four year period
- vi. Other relevant contextual information (e.g. if the member of staff is: undertaking doctoral research, or is a member of the research mentoring cohort, or is new to higher education, or has joined LJMU with relevant grant/income activity to report that is not yet captured by University systems)

24. Staff are given a deadline to ensure research output entries in the University's research information system (Symplectic Elements) are current and accurate. Grant application and outcomes data are collated from the central finance department and Research & Innovation Services, or using local records where they exist. Indicators iv) to vi) signal an individual's status regarding research independence. For transparency, individual staff receive a copy of their data and are asked to verify its completeness. Staff can request adjustments at this stage if the data are not accurate. These data are then shared with the relevant School Director.

25. Directors can draw upon information on the quality of research outputs that is available locally from the REF UOA coordinator/s. As detailed in Part 4, (paragraphs 73 to 74), all UOA coordinators have conducted exercises to examine the quality of research outputs produced in the current REF cycle, with the services of external subject/disciplinary experts engaged to verify internal quality judgements. These quality assessment processes have been incredibly valuable to the University, leading to increased capability to make quality judgements at a local/UOA level, and providing confidence that internal quality judgements are consistent with those of external experts.

26. A sub-group of the Faculty Research & Knowledge Exchange Committee (FRKEC), then meets to evaluate individual staff research inputs and outputs (the Academic Staff Research Status Panel), where each School Director makes a recommendation for each of their staff to confirm research institute/centre/group alignment and related membership status. Members of the panel can challenge recommendations and/or request sight of research outputs to validate the proposed status. Decisions made by the panel on the agreed membership status are communicated to individual staff by email within four weeks

of the panel meeting taking place.

27. To summarise, this process identifies academic staff as:

- **A core member of a research institute/centre/group (having SRIR)**
Meeting the institutional expectation (paragraphs 16 and 21) that academic staff produce two or more research outputs of quality that is recognised internationally over a four-year rolling period (pro-rata for <1.0 FTE staff); independence is signaled by contextual information including grant and income data, Director feedback); or
- **An associate member of a research institute/centre/group (not having SRIR)**
- **Not research-active (not having SRIR)**

28. Where staff have experienced circumstances such as a long-term absence from the University and this has meant that they have not been able to actively participate in the annual process described above, staff will be encouraged to submit a formal appeal (by 31 January 2021) in order to determine their status for REF2021 (paragraphs 36 to 44)⁷. Staff to whom this applies, are encouraged to contact AppealsREF2021@ljamu.ac.uk to arrange for an informal discussion about how the process will be undertaken; the intention here is that staff are fully supported through the process.

29. With local support mechanisms that focus on researcher development, coupled with growth in the breadth and depth of the research culture within the University, the expectation is that a proportion of staff with associate membership and who do not currently have SRIR will, over time transition into core members of a research centre/institute/group. A very small minority of staff, for a variety of reasons, have however reduced or ceased to engage at this level since the pilot work started in 2017/18. Such staff are being supported locally to re-ignite their development. For these staff, the REF2021 census date of 31 July 2020 will be the definitive time point at which the decision will be made as to whether they have SRIR and are included in the University's submission to REF2021. Decisions will be based on prior outcomes of the annual process described in paragraphs 19 to 23, taking into account any additional relevant data at that time, including employment expectations as described in paragraph 19.

Development of the process

30. Pilot activity has informed the development of the process to identify core members of research institutes/centres/groups (staff with SRIR). This was undertaken in 2017/18 and considered which indicators could best/reliably be used to underpin decisions around SRIR and membership status.

31. A process review conducted in December 2018 noted some mixed and inconsistent practices relating to communication and staff awareness of the inputs and outcomes of the

⁷ Routing via the appeals process limits the number of individuals with whom information about staff circumstances will be shared and discussed.

process. Resolution of these issues where they exist, was managed in the 2018/19 implementation that was undertaken between March and July 2019.

32. Formal consultation with staff committees, networks and groups on the process to define SRIR commenced in April 2019 after the publication of the final Guidance on Submissions, Panel Criteria and Working Methods, and Guidance on Codes of Practice, on 31st January 2019 (as detailed in paragraphs 6 and 8). A Common Interest Committee was held on Wednesday 29th May to facilitate formal consultation on the code of practice with the LJMU Branch of the University and College Union (UCU). The Code of Practice Working Group subsequently met on the 3rd June 2019 to consider the UCU proposals, and Part 2 of this code has been amended to incorporate UCU suggestions.

33. The processes detailed within this code of practice have been agreed with staff through appropriate staff representation mechanisms and will be communicated as described in Part 1.

Staff, committees and training

34. The process for identifying core members of research institutes/centres/groups (staff with SRIR) is the responsibility of each faculty, and decision-making is undertaken specifically by a sub-group/panel of the FRSKTC⁸. Each panel is Chaired by the relevant AD-R, and comprises the Faculty's Executive Dean and the Director of all constituent schools. Meetings are serviced with a record of all decisions formally noted. Although REF UOA coordinators are members of FRKEC's and may advise School Directors in order to inform recommendations, they do not attend the decision-making panel meeting. The University's Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research & Enterprise and Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy attend all panel meetings to provide a pan-University perspective, and ensure parity in decision-making.

35. The panels that operate in each of LJMU's five faculties share common Terms of Reference (Appendix B). Panel membership has been considered from an equality, diversity and inclusivity perspective; two faculties have been advised to co-opt senior female academic staff representatives on to their panels (from 2018/19).

36. All panel members received REF2021 equality training (July, September and November 2019). Likewise, staff managing the appeals process have received training (see Appendix F). The mandatory training is delivered by the University's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Manager together with the Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy, and content includes:

- an explanation of why equality and diversity are important in the context of REF, and to give the legal background

⁸ FRKEC entities are part of the University's formal committee structure, and report directly to the University Research & Knowledge Exchange Committee which is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research & Enterprise.

- a description of circumstances where equality issues can be taken into account when considering individual staff research outputs
- signposting staff to more detailed information about equality and diversity in the REF process
- unconscious/conscious bias as related to REF2021.

The training materials are available in the staff [intranet](#) for wider consumption.

Appeals

37. The appeals process was first communicated to staff during April 2019 as part of phase 1 of the REF2021 communications plan (paragraph 6).

38. Eligible academic staff not identified by their faculty's Academic Staff Research Status Panel as being core members of research institutes/centres/groups (not having SRIR) may appeal against the decision after they have received feedback covering the reason/s for this. Note, that appeals cannot be accepted from staff who failed to verify the accuracy of the information used as the basis for discussion by the Faculty's Academic Staff Research Status Panel. This is because disputes regarding missing or unverified data are managed by the faculty AD-R and relevant School Director.

39. Staff have the right to appeal against a decision on the grounds of discrimination e.g. on the grounds of race, sex, disability and other protected characteristics, or if absence is felt not to have been fully taken into account, and/or that individual circumstances have not been fully considered. Appeals on the grounds of academic judgement i.e. underpinning the criterion for institute/centre core membership (the assessment of the quality of the research outputs), are not eligible although appeals where due process as described in this code of practice has not been followed may be valid.

40. Appeals must be made in writing (by email), and submitted within 4 weeks of the member of staff receiving their institute/centre membership status (paragraph 26). The exception to this timescale, is where a member of staff has been absent from the University due to individual circumstances such as long-term sickness, and who returns to the University after the 4 week period. Such staff may submit their appeal up to two months after they have returned to work and up to the 31st January 2021⁹. The outcome of any appeal will be notified to staff within 4 weeks.

41. The appeals process is undertaken by the University's Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and the HR Business Partner, Policy Development (the Appeals Panel). Both are fully independent of the decisions about research institute/centre membership/identifying staff with SRIR, and will have received REF2021 equality training.

⁹ The deadline of 31st January 2021 has been set in order for all appeals to have been considered by the University, and decisions communicated, before the REF2021 submission deadline of 31st March 2021.

42. The process will involve a meeting between the applicant and members of the Appeals Panel. Staff may, if they wish, be accompanied to any appeal-related meeting by a trade union representative. Additionally, staff may wish to contact LJMU's Occupational Health service for a health professional to provide an independent perspective to the process.

43. The Chair of the Appeals Panel will consider relevant documentation, which could include, but not be limited to:

- Records/minutes from the meetings of faculty Academic Staff Research Status Panels
- The data presented at faculty Academic Staff Research Status Panel meetings
- Occupational Health records where the applicant has given their permission
- Verifiable evidence of research activity, such as records from Symplectic Elements or online research information platforms

44. Appeals should be sent to AppealsREF2021@ljmu.ac.uk.

45. The outcome of the appeals process shall be final.

Equality impact assessment

46. An interim assessment was undertaken following the introduction of the process to identify staff with SRIR (2017/18). This was requested by and reported to the University's Athena SWAN Working Group. It considered the outcome (i.e. the status of individual staff) and gender, in order to establish any differences between staff eligible for submission to REF2021 and those submittable on the basis of having significant responsibility for conducting independent research. The headline findings are:

- Research-active status was assigned to 57% of staff overall; 61% of eligible male staff and 41% of eligible females
- Role Development status was inconsistently applied across (and within) the University's five faculties

In the University's REF2014 submission (26% of eligible academic staff), 33% of eligible male staff were submitted and 20% of eligible females were returned.

47. Measures to ensure the legitimate and consistent identification of staff who should be supported through Role Development were introduced in the 2018/19 Academic Staff Research Status panel meetings.

48. A comprehensive EIA is being undertaken using the 2018/19 Academic Staff Research Status outcome data (identifying core members of research centres/institutes/groups i.e. staff with SRIR), and which will be repeated in 2019/20; these will include all protected characteristics. The data analyses will consider the characteristics of staff with SRIR in comparison to characteristics of all academic staff. The EIAs will be reported to the URKEC and LJMU's Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity Committee with clear articulation of positive or negative impacts, and recommended actions. They may also inform the content of this code of practice where greater clarity or further guidance ought to be provided on

specific aspects of the University's approach to the identification of staff with SRIR. All equality impact assessments referred to in this document will be undertaken collaboratively by the Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity Manager and Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy.

Part 3: How the University determines research independence

Policies and procedures

49. The information within this section is aimed primarily at the circa 150 LJMU staff on research-only contracts, typically Research Assistants. However, for the benefit of the broader academic staff community, staff included in the REF2021 submission, must meet the following criteria (as defined by Research England):

- Contractually, be employed on at least a 0.2 FTE basis
- Be on the University payroll on 31st July 2020
- Be employed to undertake 'teaching and research', or 'research-only'
- Have a substantive research connection with a submitting unit of assessment¹⁰
- Have significant responsibility for conducting research on an independent basis (NB staff on a 'teaching and research' contract have 'research independence' explored during the SRIR process detailed in Part 2 of this code of practice)

50. The REF2021 Guidance on Submissions defines an independent researcher "as an individual who undertakes self-directed research, rather than carrying-out another individual's research programme". Research Assistants (sometimes also described as postdoctoral research assistants or research associates) are generally employed to carry out another individual's research programme and not eligible to be returned to the REF unless they meet the definition of an independent researcher (and satisfy all the above criteria). A member of staff is not deemed to have undertaken independent research purely on the basis that they are named on one or more research outputs. Independent research-only staff must therefore:

"Demonstrate proven research capability to (on a consistent and independent basis) conduct and disseminate rigorous research that clearly advances knowledge in their field/sub-field" (paragraph 16)

51. From the 1st July 2019 (and again in July 2020), the University implemented a formal process to determine the research independence of all staff holding a research-only contract (minimum 0.2 FTE), including staff who may be on a fixed-term contract. A report containing the name, job title, faculty and School of staff with an Academic Employment Function of 2 (research-only) is provided to the Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy by a designated Systems Officer to facilitate the process..

¹⁰ Research England provide a range of indicators in paragraph 123 of the [Guidance of Submissions](#), including: participation in the UOA research environment (e.g. delivering seminars), supervision of PGRs within the UOA, involvement in research centres allied to the UOA, shared grant applications, and so on.

52. All staff holding a ≥ 0.2 FTE research-only contract are contacted by email and asked to self-report their research independence using an online survey (a Word document will be available on request should staff not wish to complete the online version). The online (and Word) documentation includes contextual information, including the definition of an independent researcher, and the following (predominantly Yes/No) questions:

- 1) What was your role prior to joining LJMU (and earlier positions if post-PhD)
- 2) In any prior roles, were you working under the supervision of a more senior member of staff? If yes, what was their job title?
- 3) Have you ever lead or acted as a principal investigator or equivalent on an externally funded research project?
- 4) Do you hold or have you held an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship where research independence is a requirement? An illustrative list of independent fellowships can be found on the REF2021 [website](#)
- 5) Do you currently, or have you in the past lead a research group or a substantial or specialised work package as part of a programme of research?
- 6) Have you ever been named as a co-investigator on an externally funded research grant/award?
- 7) Have you made a significant contribution/input into the design, conduct and interpretation of an externally funded research grant award?
- 8) Do you consider yourself to be an independent researcher?

53. Staff are sent a reminder by email one week after the original message. A staff news story accompanies the survey launch and the Concordat Forum advocate for completion amongst its network.

54. Staff not responding to the survey within the 6 week window it is open, will not be seen (by assumption) as meeting the criteria or definition of an independent researcher (and this point will be clear in the survey guidance). Nil returns are therefore be encouraged so that there is definitive evidence of a 'No' response to question 8 above.

55. Where a researcher responds 'Yes', to a question, further explanatory details can be supplied and this triggers the need for a discussion between the researcher, the coordinator of the relevant UOA, and the Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy. Questions 6 and 7 apply to units in REF Main Panels C and D only, but will be asked of all researchers in the first instance.

56. As part of the face-to-face meeting, the significance of questions 6 and 7 above are explained and taken into consideration where necessary. Researchers are asked to verify their original responses to questions 1) to 8) above, and can supplement responses as necessary. A preliminary decision on the eligibility status of the researcher is most likely be made by the Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy during the meeting, unless further evidence or clarification is required. Meetings are formally serviced with administrative support to record decisions.

57. Outcome recommendations are routed via URSKTC meetings to determine the final decision, upon which written confirmation (including details of the appeals process) will be

sent to the individual researcher, their line manager and the relevant UOA coordinator within 1 week of the URSKTC meeting.

58. In terms of timescales, decisions on the eligibility of staff holding research-only contracts in the July 2019 cohort were made by the end of September 2019. New starters on relevant contracts, or staff absent from the University during the 2019 process, will be brought into this process in July 2020. Recognising that the independent status of research-only staff may change over time, staff may participate in the review process in both 2019 and 2020.

Staff, committees and training

59. Final decisions regarding research independence will be made by URKEC following recommendations from the Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy. The post holder was involved in the equivalent process ahead of REF2014, and compiles the RESAST (research assistant) data for the annual HESA Staff return. Local/UOA REF coordinators will contribute to discussions in an advisory capacity.

60. The survey responses and records of decision-making meetings will be retained for audit purposes throughout 2021 and then deleted.

61. UOA coordinators, the Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy and members of URKEC received mandatory REF2021 equality training between May and July 2019 as detailed in Part 2, paragraph 36 (and Appendix F). The training materials are available in the staff [intranet](#) for wider consumption.

Appeals

62. The appeals process was first communicated to staff during April 2019 as part of phase 1 of the REF2021 communications plan (paragraph 5).

63. Research-only staff not deemed to meet the definition of an independent researcher may appeal against the decision after they have received feedback covering the reason/s for this (staff who did not engage in the review process may not appeal). Appeals will only be considered in cases where due account has not been taken of a staff member's individual circumstances or protected characteristics, and/or where due process as described in this code of practice has not been followed.

64. Appeals will not be considered on the grounds of professional judgement, including the assessment of the quality of the research outputs. Neither will appeals be heard which are based on new information, that was not presented at the time of the decision-making meeting. Staff wishing to highlight new indicators of research independence that have occurred since July 2019, should engage in the review process in July 2020, and not formally appeal against the original decision.

65. Appeals must be made in writing (by email), and submitted within 4 weeks of the member of staff receiving the decision regarding their eligibility for REF2021. The exception to this timescale, is where a member of staff has been absent from the University due to individual circumstances such as long-term sickness, and who returns to the University after the 4 week period. Such staff may submit their appeal up to two months after they have returned to work and up to the 31st January 2021¹¹. The outcome of any appeal will be notified to staff within 4 weeks.

66. The appeals process is undertaken by the University's Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and the HR Business Partner, Policy Development (the Appeals Panel). Both are fully independent of the decisions about research independence and will have received REF2021 equality training.

67. The process will involve a meeting between the applicant and members of the Appeals Panel. Staff may, if they wish, be accompanied to any appeal-related meeting by a trade union representative.

68. The Chair of the Appeals Panel will consider relevant documentation, which could include, but not be limited to:

- Records/minutes from the meeting/s between the member of staff, the UOA coordinator and Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy, and
- Verifiable evidence of research activity, such as records from Symplectic Elements or online research information platforms, and including grant submission portals

69. Appeals should be sent to AppealsREF2021@ljmu.ac.uk.

70. The outcome of the appeals process shall be final.

Equality impact assessment

71. Two equality impact assessments will be undertaken in relation to the process for identifying research-only staff who are independent researchers and eligible to be submitted to REF2021. Each will take place after the process outlined in paragraphs 51 to 58 has been completed. Analyses will take account of all protected characteristics, but the likely small numbers involved (circa 150 research-only staff will be contacted), may limit the findings that can be communicated. The data analyses will consider the characteristics of staff who meet the criteria for research independence compared to those who do not. The interpretation of the findings will need to take into account the way in which staff respond to the request for information (no response, nil return, affirmative respondents etc.). The EIAs will be reported to the URKEC and LJMU's Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity Committee with clear articulation of positive or negative impacts, and recommended

¹¹ The deadline of 31st January 2021 has been set in order for all appeals to have been considered by the University, and decisions communicated, before the REF2021 submission deadline of 31st March 2021.

actions. They may also inform the content of this code of practice where it will give staff greater clarity or further guidance on specific points.

Part 4: LJMU's approach to the selection of research outputs for REF2021 (including support for staff with circumstances that have constrained their ability to work productively over the REF assessment period)

Policies and procedures

72. The total number of outputs to be submitted by a UOA must equal 2.5 times the summed FTE of the unit's submitted staff. A minimum of one output per person must be returned, up to a maximum of five¹² (there is no institutional expectation that all staff will be contributing 3 outputs to the output pool). The [REF2021 Guidance on Submissions](#) details how personal circumstances that may have affected an individual's ability to produce an output or work productively over the REF period will be taken into consideration, and much of this information is detailed below (Staff Circumstances).

73. All LJMU's potential UOAs are required by URSKTC to evaluate the quality of the research outputs of the eligible staff on an ongoing, inclusive and consultative basis. This potentially includes, although not routinely, the outputs of former staff (an unknown number of whom could have been made redundant). Any outputs authored by former staff that are included in the output pool will be deemed to be of a quality that will contribute positively to the unit's profile. This review process also provides validity to the identification of staff with significant responsibility for research (Part 2). Unit of Assessment coordinators in faculties have been required to mobilise internal review processes, that are inclusive of all eligible staff, ahead of a sample of outputs undergoing moderation by external subject/disciplinary experts. Outputs identified as requiring external review are determined on the following bases: where there is disagreement in reviewer quality judgements and/or to validate internal perspective i.e. to help with calibration. External reviewers have been identified on the basis of having relevant research expertise, and their esteemed academic standing within the field. Where possible, the University has engaged the services of former REF and Research Assessment Exercise sub panel members.

74. Since October 2017, all UOAs have initiated or completed internal reviews and sought external validation of their judgements on a cyclical basis for transparency. The internal review process has typically involved 'reading groups' comprised of staff at Reader level and above and includes providing constructive feedback to individual staff on output quality. The Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy, together with the Faculty Associate Deans for Research have overseen this process for quality assurance and consistency purposes. The UOA coordinators and associated reading groups will continue to assess the quality of outputs through to the end of the publication period (31 December 2020). Where appropriate, specific advice on output eligibility for double-weighting has

¹² All staff with SRIR on the REF2021 census date of 31st July 2020 must be associated with at least one output (average 2.5; maximum of 5). The University reserves the right to include outputs produced by former staff but their FTE does not contribute to the overall UOA FTE

been sought, and the University is likely to request that most books, monographs, novels and other longer-form outputs be considered as double-weighted i.e. count as two outputs.

75. Certain UOAs (UOA 3 Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing & Pharmacy; UOA4 Psychology, Psychiatry & Neuroscience; UOA9 Physics; UOA11 Computer Science & Informatics), may use citation indices as an indicator of the academic impact of the outputs to inform the assessment of the quality of a research output. Furthermore, the publication of outputs in journals, conference proceedings, books etc. that demonstrate high levels of rigour with respect to peer review and/or editorial processes will be taken as an indicator of quality. In other cases, the member of staff may be asked to provide information that can demonstrate the quality of the cited output in terms of the main REF2021 assessment criteria, namely originality, significance and rigour.

76. Additionally, outputs published through journals and which are likely to be included in LJMU's REF submission do need to comply with the Research England Open Access Policy for REF2021 i.e. be deposited in our institutional (or a subject-specific) repository within three months of the manuscript being accepted for publication. Verification of open access compliance status at an individual output level has been conducted on an ongoing basis by staff in Library Services since April 2016 and will continue until the point of the REF submission.

77. The University will take a hierarchical approach to final output selection on the basis of quality i.e. each individual member of staff included in the submission will be directly associated with their highest quality output in the first instance. The remainder of the output pool will be dispersed to staff/authors who made a significant contribution to an output, on a decreasing quality basis until the required number of outputs for that UOA is achieved (UOA FTE x 2.5, subject to the maximum of five outputs being attributed to a single author). This process will also take account the open access status of outputs. Furthermore, where outputs are judged to be of equal quality, they will be distributed to broadly represent the constituent staff grouping (on a disciplinary basis) within the UOA. The outputs selection process will continue into December 2020 and early decisions may change in order to maximise the quality of the submission.

Staff, committees and training

78. Unit of Assessment coordinators and their reading groups operate in an advisory capacity, making recommendations on output selection and staff attribution to the relevant faculty AD-R and the University Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy. The UOA is then represented by these two individuals at URKEC where final decisions are made.

79. Members of URKEC and all UOA coordinators received mandatory REF2021 equality training in June or July 2019 as detailed in Part 2, paragraph 36. The training materials are available in the staff [intranet](#) for wider consumption.

Staff circumstances

80. The University recognises that individual staff circumstances may significantly compromise a member of staff's ability to work productively over the REF assessment period. For REF2021, staff circumstances can be taken into consideration and could result in the following:

- i. an **individual** may be returned without the required minimum of one output (i.e. the circumstances are so exceptional that the member of staff has not been able to produce the required minimum of one output)
- ii. at a **UOA** level, the total number of outputs may be reduced where the cumulative effects of staff circumstances within the unit have adversely impacted on the pool of outputs available to it (e.g. there are very high proportions of staff in the unit whose individual circumstances have affected their productivity)

81. The following equality-related circumstances apply:

- a. Qualifying as an early career researcher (first appointment as an independent academic meeting the eligibility criteria [paragraph 42] on/after 1st August 2016)
- b. Absence from work due to secondments or career breaks outside the HE sector
- c. Qualifying periods of family-related leave
- d. Other circumstances that apply in UOAs 1–6 (clinically qualified academics)
- e. Circumstances with an equivalent effect to absence, that require a judgement about the appropriate reduction in outputs, which are:
 - i. Disability: a physical and/or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities
 - ii. Ill health, injury, or mental health conditions
 - iii. Constraints relating to pregnancy, maternity, paternity, adoption or childcare
 - iv. Other caring responsibilities (such as caring for an elderly or disabled family member)
 - v. Gender reassignment
 - vi. Other circumstances relating to the protected characteristics listed Appendix I, or relating to activities protected by employment legislation.

See Appendix J¹³ for the permitted reduction in outputs associated with specific circumstances.

NB. Any relevant information that LJMU already holds on staff will **not** be used for the purpose of the REF2021 submission.

¹³ Note that these are defined by Research England in conjunction with EDAP, not by the University

The process for declaring circumstances

82. A new process was introduced in June 2019, that is entirely voluntary. It is managed in an appropriately confidential way by the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager. Staff have been invited to declare circumstances using a standard template containing associated contextual information about the applicable circumstances (Appendix K) and how the declaration process will operate.

83. Staff have been made aware of the process through direct and general communications (email, news items on the staff intranet) as part of the REF2021 communications plan outlined in Part 1 of this document. All academic staff who were absent from the University at this time (e.g. sickness absence, sabbatical) were sent a letter by People & Organisational Development to their home address directing them to the REF2021 pages of the University's staff intranet where details of the disclosure process is posted and the template is available to download or complete online should a member of staff wish to declare circumstances.

84. When deciding whether or not to declare circumstances, staff will undoubtedly weigh-up the benefits and other consequences of doing so, and the University appreciates that this will be a very personal and in some cases, an unsettling experience¹⁴. However, there may be instances where seeking and securing a reduction, particularly at unit level, recognises the unintentional impact that staff absence can have on colleagues within the UOA, who covered workloads during period/s an individual has been absent i.e. the absence affected the ability of colleagues to work productively over the REF period. Staff should be aware though, of the content of paragraphs 88 to 89 below that will influence whether the University applies to Research England for a reduction in outputs (for an individual and/or unit).

The evaluation of circumstance declarations

85. Where staff do voluntarily declare circumstances, only the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager and the HR Manager (Business Services) will have access to the complete declaration template.

86. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, the HR Manager (Business Services) and the Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy will meet to discuss anonymised information, and how each declaration is evaluated will depend on the complexity of the individual case. For example, where circumstances are clearly defined it is likely that the output reduction tariff can be applied in a straightforward manner. Where a combination of circumstances are reported including exceptional circumstances, it may not be possible to come to an initial conclusion regarding any likely reduction at an individual or unit level.

¹⁴ Staff considering declaring circumstances may wish to speak confidentially to the University's Equality, Disability and Inclusivity Manager to talk through the process. This is so that advice can be provided to help manage any anxieties and expectations.

87. Staff can expect to receive an initial acknowledgement that their template submission has been received in HR, and a follow-up email within 7 working days of this, detailing the process to be followed/next steps in the evaluation of the information.

88. Prior to the introduction of this process, all UOA coordinators provided URKEC with a reliable estimate of the output pool associated with their submission at that time, and at the point of submission. Together with knowledge of the likely UOA FTE, this information will inform judgements as to whether the available output pool for a given unit has been disproportionately affected by equality-related circumstances i.e. there is a high proportion of staff in the unit whose individual circumstances have affected their productivity and hence the outputs pool is diminished. Discipline/subject area will also be taken into consideration to recognise units covering disciplines where fewer outputs are traditionally published (e.g. where the monograph is the disciplinary norm). URKEC will identify output pool benchmarks for UOAs and flag UOAs where it would be appropriate to request a reduction in the number of outputs, should staff choose to declare circumstances.

89. The REF2021 [Guidance on Submissions](#) set's out expectations from Research England that universities will not routinely need to request reductions to the number of outputs required by a UOA. This expectation is related to the flexibility afforded by an output requirement of 2.5 (average; minimum of 1). As part-time working is taken account of within the calculation of the overall number of outputs required for the UOA (unit FTE multiplied by 2.5), Research England anticipates that reduction requests on the basis of part-time work hours will also be exceptional.

90. All staff who voluntarily declare circumstances will be offered the opportunity to meet with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manger (together with the Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy if they wish/consent to this). The purpose of the meeting is to explain how the information has been evaluated, to discuss the implications of a reduction request in the wider context of the UOA, and whether an associated reduction request is to be formally presented to Research England. A letter will be sent to all staff detailing the outcome of the internal evaluation regardless of whether staff wish to meet. Given the varied nature of the complexity of circumstances and the different preferences staff may have about their level of engagement in the decision-making process, it is not possible to specify a definitive timescale within which individual cases will be fully evaluated, but within four weeks of receipt of the declaration in HR is an indicative timescale.

91. Anonymised outcome reports will be reviewed by members of URKEC on a monthly basis from July 2019. The preparation of these reports will ensure that the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, the HR Manager (Business Services) and the Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy reflect on the consistency of their judgements.

92. Where the outcome of internal/LJMU evaluation is that a reduction should apply, the University will submit a formal request to Research England (deadline 6 March 2020). As part of this process, a supporting statement with contextual information at UOA level is provided (size, proportion of staff with declared circumstances), and detailing how the

circumstances affected the unit's output pool and why this was determined to be disproportionate. This will be managed by the Head of Research Excellence & Research Strategy.

Equality impact assessment

93. An interim analysis of staff disclosure will be undertaken in December 2019. This will serve to highlight the range of circumstances being disclosed by staff. The findings will inform phase 3 of the communications strategy (paragraph 11) to ensure staff awareness of the process. It may also inform the content of this code of practice where it can potentially provide greater clarity or further guidance. The University will include the observations and findings of this interim EIA in its Staff Circumstances report to be submitted to Research England in July 2021. This report will describe the University's experience of supporting staff with circumstances, and include an anonymised breakdown of the circumstances declared and the number of requests for the removal of the minimum of one output requirement. Additionally, it will include reflections on how the circumstances declared by staff fed into decisions on whether to request a reduction in outputs at unit level, data regarding the proportion of reduction requests through to Research England, and how staff expectations were managed overall.

94. An EIA on the distribution of outputs by the characteristics of staff within the output pool will be undertaken at University-level on the approach to submission (late-2020). Data analyses will include the number of outputs assigned to individual staff with a comparison of all protected characteristics. It will also draw upon/present contextual information where appropriate (relating to dispersal criteria described in paragraphs 76 to 77). Similarly, UOA-level analyses and narratives will be prepared to inform the content of UOA Environment templates in relation to 'People' (section 2 of the REF5b template). However, given that the number of staff within the majority of UOAs is likely to be less than 50, analyses at this level will largely be presented by gender and age.

95. A complete EIA will be undertaken for all three policies after submission to REF2021: identifying staff with SRIR; determining whether research-only staff are independent researchers; and the fair and transparent selection of outputs. This will underpin a report to be submitted to Research England in July 2021, that will present clear conclusions linked to institutional actions for improvement where necessary.

Part 5: Appendices

A: List of abbreviations used in this document

B: Terms of Reference and membership of faculty Academic Staff Research Status Panels

C: Individuals, Groups and Committees with responsibility for decision-making in REF2021

D: Terms of Reference for the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee,

E: Terms of Reference for the Code of Practice Working Group

F: Indicative schedule and target groups for REF2021 Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity Training

G: LJMU guidance on the formation and membership of University research institutes, centres and groups

H: University-conferred research institutes and centres

I: Other circumstances relating to protected characteristics (as communicated in the [Guidance on codes of practice](#) published by Research England)

J: Tariffs for the permitted reduction in outputs (these are set and published by Research England in the REF2021 [Guidance on Submissions](#); Annex L)

K: Template for the declaration of staff circumstances (this is the standard template from Research England and will be edited as bespoke for LJMU in June 2019)