

Research Expectations Tool

This paper follows consultation across the University, including with the campus trade unions as part of the partnership agreement, and builds on the work on research expectations undertaken by departments in FBaPS in 2021/2. The Tool is intended to support staff and to promote ambition in research, in accordance with the principles of the Research and Innovation Strategy.

Why a Research Expectations Tool?

There is currently a lack of clarity over what staff at different career stages might be expected to undertake in terms of research, and what constitutes a certain level of quality (e.g., 'good') in terms of research performance. This lack of clarity affects staff in terms of understanding their own performance and possible development needs; managers in terms of advising staff; and in informing potential for promotion. We therefore propose to introduce in session 2023/4 a 'Research Expectations Tool'.

This Tool is principally designed to **support staff** in managing their research careers, by providing an indication of what performance should look like in a particular disciplinary area at a particular career point. It also identifies the types of activities which staff are expected to engage in given the current research environment. The Tool may also serve to *protect* staff from unrealistic expectations.

By including aspirational indicators, this Tool is also intended to help to **drive up research performance** across AU. This is an important element of the Research and Innovation Strategy, specifically the principle of 'ambition'. It will help to place AU in a stronger position as a research-led institution, including but not exclusively for the next REF.

The Tool, and in particular the aspirational indicators, may also act as a **guide** for those staff considering promotion. It offers an indication of those expectations at the more senior career point which a member of staff is considering promotion to. It is *not* designed to assist colleagues in assessing applications for promotion.

The **Tool** provides University level guidelines in setting research expectations; Departments (or equivalent) will then use this to produce a subject-level **Framework** identifying aspirational and baseline indicators across 5 elements of research activity; individual researchers will then complete a **Form** based on this Framework (see Appendix 1 below).

Research Expectations Tool

Provides generic University-wide guidelines including principles and identifying areas of research activity



Research Expectations Framework

Provides subject specific expectations using the areas of research activity identified by the Tool



Research Expectations Form

Completed by individuals identifying the activity in each of the 5 areas identified by the Tool and calibrated against the framework

Encompassing research activities

A driving force behind the development of the Research Expectations Tool is an understanding that the research, as an activity undertaken in UK Universities, has changed. New requirements – for example on knowledge exchange, impact, civic mission, and innovation – have been placed alongside traditional activities such as publishing, editorial roles, peer reviewing, conference and workshop organisation. We have a duty to advise staff on how to balance these different activities, and as to what the University may reasonably expect of staff at different career stages. It is important to recognise that expectations vary according to career point - for example, the professoriate might be reasonably expected to play more of a leadership and mentoring role than an early career researcher (ECR). It is also important to recognise subject level differences. For example, the role of the single authored book is very different in STEM to the humanities; and PhDs play a different role in STEM subjects to AHSS and numbers vary accordingly.

How will we set expectations?

Method and principles:

1. There should be a *standard model* which can be used across AU to promote consistency and equality, but which is capable of *flexibility to accommodate disciplinary differences*.
2. The model should include *all important aspects of research performance*, not simply research outputs and/or grant capture.
3. There should be *2 levels*: a baseline for expected performance (hereafter, baseline expectations); and an aspirational level which should be indicative of excellent performance and suggestive of potential for promotion. These 2 levels provide the subject-specific Framework to inform and advise colleagues.
4. Both baseline expectations and aspirational levels should be set by departments and based on a view of *what peer departments in research-led universities expect* from their researchers. Those setting the levels may find the Edinburgh tool (appendix 2) useful in identifying different levels of expectation.
5. Both levels as set by department will be *reviewed and approved at Faculty level* to ensure comparability across cognate subjects.
6. *Each REF-eligible researcher should complete a Form* on an annual basis indicating achievements against the subject-level Framework, and referencing performance against expectations set out in the Framework. For those on fractional contracts, expectations will be calibrated accordingly. This form will replace the PeRP and will be the basis for individual research monitoring/mentoring within

Departments. NB Replacing the PeRP will place greater significance on the current expectation that colleagues keep their entry on the PURE database up to date.

7. Expectations and aspirations will be *set at subject level* which will usually coincide with academic departments (though this might not always be the case). As stated above, this will be predicated on norms for the subject area/discipline.
8. Staff members at different grades will be expected to *perform at different levels*.
9. The Form will allow discussion of achievements and aims over a number of years, reflecting the nature of research as a long wave process and the likelihood that many researchers will legitimately experience 'fallow' years as well as 'years of plenty'.
10. The Form will be used in research monitoring/mentoring to discuss individual achievements. It is recognised that individual circumstances – including PT working – may have an impact upon achievements and these should be used as context during discussions. It is also recognised that many researchers operate within teams, and achievements are therefore to some extent dependent upon the activities of others; nevertheless, this Framework is to provide developmental support for individuals and the role of the team should be discussed in the research monitoring/mentoring meetings held with a departmental director of research or equivalent.

It is important to recognise that expectations cannot be rigid and need to be contextual, including to the circumstances and background of individuals. It is also important to stress that it is not only individual effort and capacity that can lead to expectations not being met, and the research expectations framework can also be presented as a mechanism for identifying structural factors that may inhibit research performance. These could include systemic biases or disadvantages experienced by certain groups, which could in turn lead to targeted actions to address these issues.

We recognise that performance may vary considerably by staff member across the categories in the framework. It is therefore important to adopt a holistic approach to the Framework when considering research achievements. Nevertheless, over a 3-year timeframe there would normally be an expectation that an individual researcher demonstrate activity in each of the categories of the form.

University-wide expectations could be accompanied by department-specific examples of how meeting an expectation might be evidenced. So for example, in some departments the expectation of being available for PhD supervision might be evidenced by applying for PhD studentships, putting together collaborative studentships with industrial partners, etc, but these may not be appropriate as evidence in other departments where the funding environment is different. Departmental selection of evidence examples could also reflect different priorities of departmental research strategies.

How will they be used and by whom?

Individual staff will be required to complete a Research Expectations Form, which calibrates their performance against the appropriate disciplinary research expectations framework. This calibration process is intended to be supportive in nature, allowing individuals to gauge their performance and manage their research careers.

Calibrations will be longitudinal over a period of 3 years to account for the long-wave nature of research activity and will therefore include retrospective entries from the previous two years plus research plans for the forthcoming 12 months.

The Form will be used in individual research monitoring/mentoring within departments, assisting those staff engaged in research monitoring to advise individuals and when aggregated to gauge the department's performance. The Form will therefore replace the PeRP, and may replace other research monitoring forms currently used by a number of departments. The data will also be made available to the University's Research Monitoring Team.

The five elements of the form should be viewed holistically – that is, we recognise that some researchers' may prioritise some activities over others either because of their relative strengths, or because of a stage in the research cycle, or because of current need.

Assessment against baseline expectations/aspirations may be used by individual staff considering promotion, and by HoDs or line managers advising and guiding staff in promotion conversations. The Research Expectations Tool and the disciplinary Framework should not in themselves be used as criteria for promotion. The baseline expectations for a Senior Lecturer, for example, should be what is expected of an individual *after* they have been appointed to SL level not what is required in order to be promoted to SL.

Consistent underperformance where reasonable research time has been allocated is a matter of concern and may require mentoring, training or forms of developmental support. The disciplinary Framework may be used to assist line managers in making an assessment of whether a colleague is consistently underperforming and may need support - but the emphasis is on the Framework as a developmental tool not as a disciplinary tool. The Framework should primarily be used by individuals to assess their own activities against relevant expectations and to adjust plans accordingly. Advice and feedback on this should be provided through the Research Mentoring & Monitoring meetings, which might include discussing inhibiting factors that are beyond the individual's control and seeking to find solutions. Where an individual either

refuses to engage with changing their practice to try to meet activities, or consistently fails to meet expectations despite support having been provided, this will be raised with their line manager.

Implementation & Review

Departments will be asked to submit their framework(s) to Faculties by 1 December 2023

Faculties will be asked to approve frameworks by 18 December 2023

Researcher will be asked to complete individual form by 28 February 2024

Forms will inform research monitoring May 2024.

Departments will normally be expected to update the Framework every 2-3 years to ensure that it remains up to date with contemporary developments in the research landscape. These will be reviewed by Faculties.

The Tool will be reviewed after 2 years of operation by Research and Innovation Committee, including consideration of its impact upon ED&I and upon the use of Welsh in research; a recommendation on its continued use or evolution passed to University Executive and Senate.

	<p><i>areas the use of metrics and other proxy indicators is more problematic than others, and that for some output forms (eg performance) extremely difficult. When this is the case, researchers should be encouraged to reference an output against REF2021 quality indicators.</i></p> <p><i>2. Some subject areas will require an either/or approach (eg '1 authored book or 3 short form outputs or 1 performance with an additional published output')</i></p>									
Research impact, KE & Innovation	Engagement with research-based knowledge exchange, innovation, commercialisation, or civic mission activities.	<p><i>To be set by Department:</i></p> <p>Expectation:</p> <p>Aspiration:</p>								

	<i>Evidence might include incorporating a 'Pathways to impact' strategy in a research proposal or business, government or other stakeholder engagement with research activities.</i>	<i>To be completed by individual researcher:</i> Achievements: Plans:								
Leadership and contribution to the discipline	Demonstration of activities that contribute to the departmental or institutional research environment, or a contribution to the discipline. <i>This may be evidenced through: Management of PhD / DProf programme, leading a research hub/centre, journal editorship / special issues, conference organisation, organising a networking event, esteem factors, external research degree examination, presentation at external / internal conference, research council boards etc.</i>	<i>To be set by Department:</i> Expectation: Aspiration: <i>To be completed by individual researcher:</i> Achievements: Plans:								
PhD / DProf supervision:	Supervision of MPhil/PhD / DProf students.	<i>To be set by Department:</i> Expectation: Aspiration: <i>To be completed by</i>								

		<i>individual researcher:</i> Achievements: Plans:								
Grant application:	Average value of submitted research, consultancy or enterprise grant applications, normalised against discipline/funder. Individuals are encouraged to identify successful applications. <i>Only applications for externally funded research is eligible in this field (for example, from a research council, but not from URF etc). Applicants should also aim to be PI in at least one application over the REF period.</i>	<i>To be set by Department:</i> Expectation: Aspiration: <i>To be completed by individual researcher:</i> Achievements: Plans:								

Appendix Two: Edinburgh University Research Careers Tool

EXPERIENCE: Starting  Advanced

	Fellowships	PhD	Post-doctoral	Early Career	Mid Career	Senior/Advanced				
Research	Grants	Project Studentship	RA/PDRF on collaborative grant	Small grant	Co-I on collaborative grant/ work package lead	PI on small collaborative grant	Scaling up PI role	PI on large collaborative grant		
	Research Skills	Develops new skills		Methods training	Interdisciplinarity		Develops new areas of expertise			
	Outputs & Publications	PhD outputs		Post-doctoral outputs	Continues to build portfolio	Targets wider academic audiences		Guides and co-authors with ECRs		
	Academic Dissemination	Conference poster	Conference paper	Organises panel	Invited speaker	Organises workshop/ conference	Organising committee of major conference	Keynote speaker		
Engagement	Wider Dissemination	Social media engagement		Writes Blogs	Hosts own Blogsite	Contributes to/ hosts public events		Contributes to articles in media	Media interviews	
	Knowledge Exchange	Engages with users		Specialised workshops		Advisory roles/ evidence		Consultancy	Specialised/ targeted briefings	
	External Partnerships	Practice background		Consulting users	Involving users	Collaborative project	Co-design	Co-production		
	Mobility	Collaborative PhD		Internships		Placements		Secondments	Dual roles	
	Journals	Book reviews		Peer reviewer	Editorial Board member		Journal Editor	Launching new journal		
Leadership & Collegiality	Peer Review	Article reviews		Grant peer review	PhD examiner	External appointment panel/assessors	Grant review panels	Chairs grant review panels	Grant funding strategy role	
	Collegiality	Peer support group	Informal peer review		Mentoring	Research coaching	Review panels	Initiates/leads research support systems		Leads by example/ shares experiences
	Research Clusters	PhD or ECR network/ reading group			Co-leading research group			Centre Co-Director/ Launch new research group		Centre Director
	Sectoral Leadership	Join/network in Professional Association (PA)			Lead a section/working group in PA		Establish new network	Leadership role in PA		Fellow of Learned Society

CROSS-CUTTING VALUES: Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Research Integrity Collegiality & Support