

Code of Practice

Institution name: Aberystwyth University (AU)

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Part 1: Introduction

What is REF 2029, and why is it important?

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is a UK-wide system for assessing the excellence of research in higher education institutions (HEIs), providing accountability for publicly funded research and assessing the health of the UK research sector as a whole. REF 2029 is the latest in a series of these assessments of research quality, which evaluate examples of the research conducted in each HEI over a period of ~7 years. A successful outcome in REF 2029 is extremely important to Aberystwyth University because it informs the level of mainstream quality-related (QR) public research funding we will receive annually in the years until the subsequent REF submission (currently > £6m per year as a result of our REF 2021 performance), and also provides access to other funds to support research and researchers. The REF result also directly influences our position in rankings and league tables, which in turn impacts on external perceptions of our research and teaching.

How does REF 2029 differ from previous REF assessments?

REF 2029 differs significantly from previous assessment exercises in a number of key respects, most notably:

- i) the 'decoupling' of individual staff from the outputs submitted to REF disciplinary areas (termed Units of Assessment (UoAs)) and emphasis on assessment at institutional and Unit of Assessment (UoA) level,
- ii) changes to the census period and the calculation of the volume of outputs to be submitted for a given UoA, and
- iii) changes to the weightings, descriptions, and requirements for the three elements that make up each submission to REF 2029 UoAs

Other aspects of the previous REF (REF 2021) remain unchanged, such as the requirement for all staff with Significant Responsibility for Research and Research Independence to be accurately identified as such, to ensure accurate calculation of the volume of the required submission for each UoA.

REF 2029 also repeats the emphasis of previous exercises on expert peer review for assessment under subject-based UoAs. Assessments consider quality in three elements:

- Contribution to knowledge and understanding (55% weighting) – replaces the Outputs element of REF 2021; is based on assessment of research outputs.
- Engagement and impact (25% weighting) – replaces the Impact element of REF 2021; consists of impact case studies.
- Strategy, people and research environment (20% weighting) – replaces the Environment element of REF 2021 and includes an increased emphasis on the research environment at both institutional and UoA level.

As in previous REFs, each element of a UoA submission to REF 2029 will be awarded grades based on a 5-point scale (ranging from 4* to U, unclassified), and an overall grade for the UoA submission will also be calculated using the weightings of the three assessed elements above.

What is the purpose of this Aberystwyth University Code of Practice for REF 2029?

This Code of Practice (CoP) is a requirement for REF 2029 and sets the minimum standard for Aberystwyth University's (AU's) participation in the exercise. It is a living document and will be reviewed at least annually and updated as appropriate. The CoP describes how AU will make key decisions about our submission to the exercise. These decisions concern identifying contracts that contribute to the REF volume measure ([Parts 2 and 3](#) of the CoP), allocating volume to Units of Assessment (UoAs; [Part 4](#) of this CoP), and selecting research outputs for submission to REF 2029 ([Part 5](#) of this CoP). More information about the [REF Volume Measure](#) and [Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding](#) modules can be found in the associated [REF 2029 Code of Practice](#) guidance.

During implementation of the AU CoP for REF 2029, if any concerns arise regarding practices at AU which may not follow the principles and practices of the CoP, these concerns should be shared with the University Secretary and Director of Welsh Language, via vcostaff@aber.ac.uk where concerns will be handled confidentially.

1.1 The policies and processes set out in this CoP support the REF 2029 principles of robustness, transparency, and equity and inclusion:

- a) **Robustness** – ensuring that the REF submission accurately represents the research conducted at AU. This includes ensuring that the contracts identified as contributing to the volume measure reliably reflect the responsibilities of staff; this will be achieved using the policies and processes previously approved and published in the AU CoP for REF 2021 to identify staff with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) and Research Independence (RI).

These processes are described in [Part 2](#) and [Part 3](#) of this CoP for REF 2029.

- b) **Transparency** – for all staff regarding how decisions concerning the REF submission are made, and to ensure that the processes followed are fair for all, and to support staff awareness and understanding of the Code of Practice (CoP) which describes these processes.

The AU REF 2029 CoP builds on the experience of the REF 2021 CoP, and has been developed in collaboration with AU staff, protected groups, working groups and committees, in addition to Human Resources, Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and Centre for Welsh Language Services colleagues, groups working strategically on EDI issues and on responsible research assessment, and Union representatives (see Appendix section 6.2 for further detail regarding the engagement and communication process involved in the development of the CoP).

To support this process of engagement, information regarding the CoP has been shared in various formats (through in-person or online meetings, discussions and presentations, and through e-mail communications inviting anonymous feedback). Whilst the length of the document and pressures of time and resources mean that unfortunately the draft CoP could only be made available for circulation to staff through the medium of English, the final version of the CoP approved by Medr (anticipated around Autumn 2026) will be available in both English and Welsh.

The CoP approved in 2026 (which is a living document throughout the REF cycle) will be distributed through various appropriate channels, including [all-staff e-mail](#) (sent to all staff regardless of role or leave of absence) and to [‘research-active staff’ e-mail](#) lists; via

Department/Institute/School Boards (open to all departmental/Institute/School staff) and their Research Leadership Groups; via Faculty Research Leadership Groups and the University Research and Innovation Committee (involving Directors of Research, research leads, and professional services staff with leading research roles); via the University Senior Leadership Group and University Senate (involving leaders and representatives from across AU). The Department of Research, Business & Innovation (RBI) web pages and staff intranet will also be used to support staff understanding of REF and the AU CoP, including through the development of FAQs, and to provide updates on progress and share information. The CoP will also be published and made available externally via AU webpages, as appropriate. In consultation with AU Human Resources, staff who are either seconded to organisations beyond AU or on leave of absence (including due to ill-health) will be sent either an electronic copy of the approved CoP via e-mail or a hard copy to their current home address, as appropriate.

- c) **Equity and inclusion** – ensuring that the decisions made about submissions are fair and impartial and support both the diversity of people and of our research, where diverse contributions are valued and supported.

This CoP is founded on a commitment to equity and inclusion, informed by our University-wide commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), and to treating colleagues with dignity and respect. At AU, EDI is more than a statement of how the University will meet statutory requirements. We recognise and value the diversity of roles and activity that support our research, and value and support the diversity of research practice and of our people. We promote inclusive and equitable research cultures, and we strive to ensure that students and staff embrace equity and diversity as an essential part of how we operate, and to embed this way of working in everything we do.

Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) and Welsh Language Impact Assessments (WLIAs), are used to build equality and equity considerations into our decision-making, including specifically around the CoP and REF-related policies and processes. EDI training is mandatory for all university staff, including unconscious bias training. All those involved with REF advisory and decision-making processes undergo additional training, including responsible research assessment and regarding diversity of outputs.

1.2 Contextualisation of the CoP within Institutional Policies:

a) **The Welsh Language, and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)**

Aberystwyth University's celebration of the Welsh language and of diversity is embedded in the core mission of the University strategy: "*Rooted in rural Wales, proudly bilingual and cosmopolitan, Aberystwyth University inspires people to change lives for the better around the world*". Launched in May 2025, the University's *Strategy 2030s* also sets out the values that guide our behaviour, including the following which underpin our approach to the development and deployment of this Code of Practice for REF 2029:

- **Equity and inclusion:** We welcome, support, and respect different people, perspectives, and ways of being in the world.
- **Togetherness:** We work closely with one another to develop a mutually supportive, constructive, and highly productive environment that promotes quality of life and professional fulfilment.

- **Integrity:** We build trust by treating one another with respect, by communicating in a clear and timely manner, and by being open about how we make our decisions.

Strategy 2030s is underpinned by nine University plans to support delivery of the Aberystwyth University (AU) strategy, of which the plans with greatest direct relevance to the AU REF 2029 CoP and its principles are *'Our People'*, *'The Welsh Language'*, *'Equity, Diversity and Inclusion'*, and *'Research and Innovation'*.

AU is committed to bilingualism, seeking to create an environment in which all members of the University and the community can feel at ease in their chosen language, whether that is Welsh or English. But beyond communication, the University also recognises the role and significance of the Welsh Language in culture and communities.

The AU Welsh Language plan is aligned with the statutory duties placed on Welsh institutions to comply with the Welsh Language Standards (No. 6) Regulations 2017, established under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, and the expectations of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022. The Welsh Language Standards explain how the University is expected to provide specific services through the medium of Welsh, ensuring that the Welsh language is treated no less favourably than the English language. The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 goes beyond the equal treatment of Welsh and English languages, placing a strategic duty on Medr (and on the institutions registered with or funded by Medr) to promote and encourage greater use of the Welsh language across the institution and through education provision. Medr's Regulatory Framework sets out the guiding principles by which Medr will undertake their regulatory duties, in line with the requirements of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022. As a condition of registration and of funding, Medr's Regulatory Framework also requires Welsh institutions, where appropriate, to take all reasonable steps to promote and encourage the carrying out of research and innovation activities which support the Welsh language.

AU has adopted the approach of embedding EDI in our culture, leadership, decision-making and every aspect of university life to create an inclusive, supportive working and learning environment. The aim is for the University to be a community that promotes a sense of belonging and where everyone feels welcome, included and supported, free from discrimination, harassment and victimisation. A community where individuals are respected and valued, in an environment where they can be their authentic self and reach their full potential.

The University's commitment to EDI is illustrated through the attainment since REF 2021 of Athena Swan Charter Bronze Award (September 2023), Disability Confident Employer status (renewed 2025), Stonewall Workplace Equality Index ranked 45th in the UK and achieved LGBTQ+ Inclusive Employer Gold Award 2024, and Race Equality Charter Bronze Award (April 2025). This is in addition to the establishment of staff-led equality networks and protected groups. AU is an accredited Living Wage Employer, and is committed to closing the gender and ethnicity pay gaps. The University is also committed to tackling barriers to career progression and ensuring that our leadership and decision-making groups reflect the diversity of our AU community (e.g. through the introduction in 2022 of a policy on the use of [fixed term contracts at AU](#), to address the issue of contract precarity through ensuring continuity of employment for staff wherever reasonably possible).

Aberystwyth University is a signatory to, and committed to the principles of, the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. University policy ensures that where fixed term (including contract research) and part-time contracts are used, they are used appropriately, and that those staff benefit from the same terms and conditions as staff with full-

time or open-ended contracts, including (but not limited to) access to career development and training opportunities, University facilities, and participation in University governance and committees.

Specifically in terms of REF 2029 and the AU Code of Practice, our policies and processes ensure that staff on fixed term and/or part-time contracts, and the research outputs they produce, are treated no less favourably than open-ended or full-time staff and their research outputs.

All staff across the University (regardless of role or contract type, and hence including fixed term and part-time staff in both academic and non-academic roles) were sent a copy of the draft AU CoP and invited to open sessions to discuss the CoP, and were also invited to provide comments via an anonymous feedback mechanism, which were considered prior to submission of the CoP. Protected Groups and other key groups were also contacted directly to share the draft CoP and invite feedback during open sessions or via an anonymous route for comments – these groups included the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Staff Network, Disability and Wellbeing Network, Equality Champions Network, LGBT Staff Network, Peri/Post/Menopause Support Group, Women in Research Network, and the Early Career Researcher Network. The process of CoP development, engagement and feedback is outlined more fully in Appendix 6.2 of this CoP.

b) Positive research culture(s)

Key priorities of the Research and Innovation plan for Aberystwyth University include enabling ambitious research conducted with integrity, and creating a thriving research and innovation culture and enhancing our capacity for research. These priorities are underpinned by the provision of clear governance structures, guidance and support, balanced with training, development, and networking opportunities for researchers and research-enabling staff. Other initiatives aimed at enhancing positive research culture(s) at AU include:

- Promotion and dissemination of research activities and outputs internally and externally.
- Celebrating research success stories across all staff groups and career paths.
- Encouraging and supporting the development of researcher-led groups, including Women in Research Network (WIRN) and the Early Career Researcher (ECR) Network.
- Participating in external research culture activities, including initiatives within Wales involving Medr, Learned Society of Wales, and Wales Innovation Network (WIN).
- Organising regular networking events and thematic research fora to stimulate cross-disciplinary collaboration.
- Offering support for research and innovation activity across our research community, including supporting cross-disciplinary research.
- Offering support through internally funded schemes in addition to supporting the development of high-quality external funding bids.
- Ensuring visibility, recognition, career development and sustainability for technicians through the Technician Commitment (initially launched within the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS)).

c) Responsible Research Assessment (RRA)

Aberystwyth University is committed to responsible research assessment. It is a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA; signed in 2020), and is aligned to the principles of the Leiden Manifesto and the four core commitments of The Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA). The University also established a Responsible Research Assessment Group (RRAG) in January 2026, which operates in an advisory capacity, and includes nine staff members representing the diversity of AU departments, subjects, research types, and career stages, recruited via an open call for expressions of interest.

The processes of research assessment outlined in the AU REF 2029 CoP are aligned with the principles of [Aberystwyth University's statement on the Responsible Use of Research Metrics](#); namely, that processes of expert review underpin the assessment of research at AU, and any metrics used to inform and support this judgement will be chosen carefully and appropriately depending on the context and purpose of the exercise taking place.

All AU staff are expected to complete core training and development in Diversity in the Workplace, Unconscious Bias, Race in the Workplace; this must be completed/updated prior to undertaking any assessment under the REF 2029 CoP. Core training in General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Information Security is also offered by AU and must be completed/updated by reviewers and members of advisory and decision-making groups applying the REF 2029 CoP. Additionally, these reviewers and members of advisory and decision-making groups applying the REF 2029 CoP will receive training in responsible research assessment and in diversity of research outputs.

The University is committed to educating staff and students in the responsible and legitimate use of generative AI, and AI applications more broadly, whilst maintaining academic rigour and integrity. The [University Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence \(AI\)](#) has adopted the [set of principles proposed by the Russell Group](#) regarding the use of generative AI. This AU statement also makes clear the importance of transparency in declaring when, and to what extent, generative AI has been used by staff or students. It also highlights the potential for biases and discrimination when using generative AI, in addition to other potential ethical and data protection concerns which may arise. Any use of generative AI within the development or application of the REF 2029 CoP or the REF submission itself would therefore be clearly stated and conducted in accordance with AU policy and guidance.

1.3 Update on Actions Since REF 2021:

A number of key initiatives have been pursued since REF 2021, to address the significant gender imbalance (of staff and in output allocations) noted by the EIAs conducted following both REF 2014 and REF 2021, and the low levels of ethnic diversity in the University across all roles including research (albeit at slightly greater levels within AU compared to the region). These equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives include:

- The development of staff-led networks and protected groups that feed directly into the EDI agenda via formal reporting routes (Equality Champions Network, Disability and Wellbeing Network, LGBT staff network, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff network, Peri/Post/Menopause Support Group, and the Women in Research Network).
- Revitalisation of the Women in Research Network (WIRN), including representation at the University Research and Innovation Committee.

- Launch of the Aberystwyth University Visibility Awards, challenging the dominant representation of success by celebrating the contribution to AU research of women and non-binary members of staff beyond those who are more traditionally recognised in research.
- Establishment of a vibrant and active Early Career Researcher (ECR) Network, providing support and advice to people who are interested in research and consider themselves as early career researchers at AU.
- Addressing the issue of contract precarity through the introduction (in 2022) of a policy on the use of fixed terms contracts at AU, ensuring continuity of employment for staff wherever reasonably possible.
- Securing an Athena Swan Charter Bronze Award (September 2023) in recognition of AU's commitment to promoting gender equality across the University.
- Renewal of AU's Disability Confident Employer status (renewed 2025).
- Stonewall Workplace Equality Index ranked 45th in the UK and achieved LGBTQ+ Inclusive Employer Gold Award 2024.
- AU commitment to tackling racism and to being actively anti-racist, supporting the Welsh Government's vision of making Wales an anti-racist nation.
- Securing a Race Equality Charter Bronze Award (April 2025).
- Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS) becoming a signatory to the Technician Commitment (June 2025).
- Establishment of an AU Responsible Research Assessment Group (RRAG).

Part 2: Identifying Staff Contracts with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR)

As part of the process of breaking the link between individual researchers and the content of REF submissions, and to remove the problematic incentives created by using a single census date to determine the volume measure for each institution's REF submission (e.g. as used in REF 2021), REF 2029 will instead use an average volume measure determined over a multiple-year census period, calculated from the HESA staff record data. For this reason, it is necessary for institutions participating in REF 2029 to comprehensively identify all staff contracts with [Significant Responsibility for Research \(SRR\)](#).

At Aberystwyth University, all of the institution's 'teaching and research' (ACEMPFUN 3) contracts in the HESA staff record already comprehensively identify all staff with Significant Responsibility for Research. Therefore, all such staff contracts will be identified as REF 2029 qualifying on the HESA staff record (REFQUALCON), and the average of the CONFTE (percentage of a full-time equivalent year worked) of such contracts over the academic year periods of 2025-2027 will determine the staff volume measure for their allocated REF 2029 Unit of Assessment (UoA) (REFUOA2029).

Part 3: Determining Research Independence (RI)

As outlined in [Part 2](#), above, to determine the volume measure for each institution's REF 2029 submission an average volume measure determined over a multiple-year census period is used, calculated from the HESA staff record data. [Research Independence \(RI\)](#) is defined by REF 2029 as undertaking self-directed research, rather than primarily carrying out another individual's research programme, and contributes to the volume measure. For this reason, it is necessary for institutions participating in REF 2029 to clearly outline the criteria and evidence used to assess research independence of staff contracts.

This RI section only applies to those AU colleagues whose contracts are 'research-only' (ACEMPFUN 2) in the HESA staff record, even if they are required (for various reasons) to teach or undertake other, non-research related activities by their Head of Department (HoD).

It must be emphasised that this process of assessing the research independence of 'research-only' staff contracts only influences the volume measure required for the submission made to REF 2029; it does not have any bearing on the role being assessed, or on career progression, or on the eligibility of research by the individual staff member as a potential contribution to the AU REF 2029 submission.

3.1 Policies and Procedures:

a) **Criteria and Evidence:**

- i. Staff contracted at Grade 8 and above will be assumed to be operating within a research independent role, i.e. research independence is an inherent expectation of their contract, as per the stated HERA criteria [<https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hr/info-staff/employment/agreement/academic-profiles/>], and will be identified as such in the HESA staff return (REFQUALCON).
- ii. Staff contracted at Grade 7 and below will be assumed not to be operating within a research independent role, as per the stated HERA criteria [<https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hr/info-staff/employment/agreement/academic-profiles/>], and will be identified as research assistants (those that are primarily carrying out another individual's research programme) in the HESA staff record.
- iii. It is recognised however, that staff at Grade 7 can be working towards research independence and may already be operating at such a level. Indicators of research independence can include (but are not necessarily limited to):
 - o acting as lead applicant (Principal Investigator (PI)) on externally funded research projects;
 - o holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship requiring research independence;
 - o leading a research group or a substantial/ specialised work package.
- iv. A review process, as described below in section b.i, will be conducted in order to identify any Grade 7, research-only contracted staff member operating as an independent researcher rather than primarily carrying out another individual's research programme.
- v. Once identified, research independence is to be considered persistent.

Therefore, any research-only contracted member of staff previously identified as an independent researcher within the REF 2021 exercise will continue to be considered as research independent for REF 2029, unless there has been a significant change in contract.

b) Decision-Making and Communication:

- i. In March of the academic year 2024-25 - the pilot year for newly introduced fields for REF 2029 in the HESA staff record - a central review of all Grade 7, research-only contracts was conducted in the first instance by the REF & Research Monitoring Manager, as described below, to identify those staff who are operating as independent researchers:
 - o A list of staff identified as Principal Investigator (PI) or Co-I on the internally held records for externally funded research grants that are active within the REF 2029 census period was reviewed, to identify and indicate staff operating as research independent staff members.
 - o Any member of research-only contracted staff holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship requiring research independence was identified as an independent researcher. The qualifying *Research Fellowships* list, issued for REF 2029 [<https://2029.ref.ac.uk/publication/research-fellowships/>] was used as a reference.
 - o The responsibilities held by a research-only contracted member of staff with an open-ended contract was reviewed with the individual member of staff or their line manager, and the relevant HR Business Partner, for markers of research independence as described in Part 3.1.a.iii.
 - o This first round of reviews was completed by the end of July 2025, for reporting within the 2024-25 HESA staff record.
- ii. All research-only contracted staff considered in the process outlined Part 3.1.b.i, above, were contacted, in the first instance, by 15 August 2025 to inform them of whether they have been identified as an independent researcher, and therefore, holding a contract that qualifies as contributing to the staff volume measure for REF 2029 (REFQUALCON).
- iii. From the start of academic year 2025-26, any newly recruited member of research-only contracted staff will be flagged for assessment of whether the contract they hold can be considered to be research independent as per the criteria in Part 3.1.a.iii. This will be determined by the recruiting line manager, with advice from the relevant HR Business Partner, and noted in the individual's contract of employment.
- iv. This process will also be conducted for any current research-only contracted staff member who receives a change of contract from the start of the academic year 2025-26.

3.2 Staff, Committees, and Training:

a) Roles and Responsibilities:

- i. The REF & Research Monitoring Manager¹ will complete the initial review of each staff list using the [REF 2029 Staff Volume measure guidance](https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/section-3-volume-measure-guidance/) [<https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/section-3-volume-measure-guidance/>] as a reference regarding establishing research independence.
- ii. The contents of this guidance will be cascaded down to each individual HR Business Partner², so they are making informed decisions in discussions with individual staff members and their line managers. Evidence of the markers for research independence will be recorded and kept

¹ The REF & Research Monitoring Manager was recruited through a publicly advertised appointment in 2013, the current incumbent of the role having over 14 years' experience of REF submissions as of 2025.

² All HR Business Partners have been recruited through publicly advertised appointments.

within the REF records, for the purposes of any audit, until one year after the release of the REF 2029 results (end of 2030).

- iii. The REF Submission Group (RSG) (Chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, and described in full in [Part 5.2.a.v](#)) makes decisions on key elements of the REF submission, and will have the final decision on whether a colleague's contract of employment can be judged to demonstrate research independence, or not.

b) Training:

All AU staff are expected to have completed the following core courses: *Diversity in the Workplace*, *Unconscious Bias*, *Let's talk about Race in the Workplace*, and to ensure their knowledge is updated within three years of last completing each course. Staff are also required to complete/update core General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Information Security training courses. It will be confirmed that all staff involved in the decision-making processes outlined herein have kept their training up to date.

3.3 Appeals:

- i. An individual may appeal a decision regarding their contract's research independence, i.e. that it does, or does not, demonstrate research independence (if identified as otherwise), by making an evidenced case, utilising the criteria in Part 3.1.a.iii.
- ii. Research independence appeals should be sent to research@aber.ac.uk, to enable the REF Submission Group (RSG) to make a decision on whether a colleague's contract of employment can be judged to demonstrate research independence, or not.
- iii. For research independence reviews completed by the end of July 2025 (for reporting within the 2024-25 HESA staff record), applications were to be received by 19 September 2025 via research@aber.ac.uk. Decisions on any appeal were to be communicated to individual staff members by 16 October 2025, and contract status related to REF 2029 indicated on the HESA staff record.
- iv. From August 2025 onwards, appeals regarding the outcome of research independence assessments will be reviewed on a rolling basis. Appeals must be received by research@aber.ac.uk within 4 working weeks of the initial decision of Research Independence being issued.
- v. Decisions regarding the outcome of an appeal will be communicated to individual staff members within 4 working weeks of receipt by research@aber.ac.uk, and contract status related to REF 2029 indicated on the HESA staff record.

3.4 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA):

- i. At this stage of the CoP development, the EIA conducted regarding determining research independence is an initial qualitative assessment.
- ii. Quantitative EIAs will be conducted to include data from all staff on both a teaching and research, and a research-only contract. These EIAs will analyse data for all protected characteristics, where available, including data related to Welsh-language capabilities, and full-time and part-time working.
- iii. Each EIA will then compare such characteristics between the volume contributing staff population – those determined to hold a contract with Significant Responsibility for Research or Research Independence- and the non-volume contributing staff population.

- iv. To facilitate EIA analysis, benchmark data were collected after the first review in March 2025 and scheduled to be repeated in September 2025, after the review of any appeals received (*n.b.* no appeals were received). This data collection will be repeated in September 2026 and September 2027, to enable EIAs to be conducted to assess any changes in the staff populations over the HESA staff record REF 2029 staff-volume contributing years.
- v. Where an identified proportion of the population within the EIAs is so small (under 5) that individual staff members could be identified, and where this also significantly affects the reported percentages, the EIA will simply acknowledge this and highlight the instance as having a notable impact on a specific group but will not include any specific figures.
- vi. The purpose of the EIAs is to help AU identify any potential inadvertent discrimination in REF 2029 processes and pinpoint policies/ practices with a positive impact or opportunities to advance equality.
- vii. If potential discrimination is found, AU will take action to change the policy/ practice or justify retaining it within legal constraints. The CoP would be updated where appropriate.
- viii. All completed EIAs will be included in the appendices of the final CoP.

Part 4: Allocating Contracts to UoAs

The volume measure for REF 2029 is calculated over the 2025-2027 multiple-year HESA Staff record census period via the average CONFTE of the staff contracts identified as having Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) and Research Independence (RI), as outlined in [Parts 2](#) and [3](#) of this CoP. These staff contracts contributing to the volume measure also need to be mapped to the Unit of Assessment (UoA) to which they are principally associated (indicated using the REFUOA2029 field in the HESA Staff record). This section of the CoP describes the allocation of AU volume contributing (REFQUALCON) contracts to UoAs.

It should be noted that the REF 2029 Volume Measure guidance recognises that UoA allocation may change between annual returns, reflecting the evolving nature of research and of substantive connections. The same guidance also notes that whilst HESA cost centres and UoAs may be directly related in many cases, it is acceptable for them not to align exactly as long as the allocation of contracts to a UoA is logical, and a rationale can be provided for the approach taken. This flexibility is particularly important for smaller institutions, such as Aberystwyth University, which may have multiple organisational structures for teaching purposes which are necessarily smaller and differently focussed than the institution's research groupings.

It is also important to note that the REF 2029 submission for a given UoA does not have to be authored by individuals whose contracts contribute to the volume measure (at institution level or for that UoA). Similarly, the eligible outputs of any member of staff are not limited to submission in the UoA associated with their HESA Staff record.

4.1 Policies and Procedures:

a) **Criteria and Evidence:**

Key to the allocation of contracts to UoAs is the alignment with the disciplinary areas defined by the UoA descriptors and set out in the Panel criteria and working methods. Until the publication of the REF 2029 Final Guidance on Submission and Panel Criteria and Working Methods (anticipated in Autumn 2026), AU will use the REF 2021 UoA descriptors when considering the allocation of contracts to UoAs.

A number of methodologies will be utilised to determine the most suitable UoAs for allocation of volume-contributing (REFQUALCON) AU contracts, and the results compared and cross-verified prior to allocation in the HESA Staff record using the REFUOA2029 field. These approaches are described below:

- i. Considering formal organisational structures coupled with research-focussed evidence
There will be situations where the disciplinary area (UoA) associated with the research activity of a volume-contributing (REFQUALCON) contract is closely aligned with a single department/school/institute organisational structure where the contract is held. In such cases, the allocation of that contract to a UoA may be relatively straightforward. This is the starting point for consideration of UoA allocations in this methodology.

However, there will also be situations where the disciplinary area associated with the volume-contributing contract is much less closely aligned to the disciplinary area of the department/school/institute structure, and/or where multiple disciplinary areas may be relevant to the research activity of a volume-contributing staff member. In these cases, in addition to the organisational structure where the contract is held, additional lines of research-focussed evidence will also be consulted when considering the most appropriate disciplinary area associated with that volume-contributing contract.

This research-focussed evidence will include affiliation with other university research structures (e.g. research groups, Centres, hubs etc); internal research collaborations; external research affiliations and collaborations; external funding sources; disciplinary area(s) of researchers supervised (i.e. staff without RI, and PhD researchers); disciplinary area(s) of research outputs within the current REF cycle.

ii. Indication of UoA alignment by staff, through output nomination

In the period 4 April to 16 May 2025 all staff identified as holding a REF 2029 volume measure contributing contract were requested to nominate at least one, but up to a maximum of three, completed research outputs from the current REF cycle that they considered to be their strongest in terms of REF's criteria of 'originality, significance and rigour'. They were also asked to flag, in order of suitability, up to three UoAs (selected from any of the 34 REF 2021 UoAs) that each output most closely aligned with. It was clearly stated that this exercise was not for the nomination of outputs for review, but instead was to identify the disciplinary areas of research activity within AU, as defined by the volume-contributing researchers themselves.

In total, 76% of the identified population completed the exercise and the resultant data were analysed to determine the most frequently identified UoAs as first, second and third choice, as well as overall frequency. Those UoAs that were identified as being able to support a 9.99 FTE/ 25 output submission were flagged for further consideration.

iii. Language modelling analysis of nominated output abstracts against REF 2021 UoA descriptors

A language modelling analysis was devised and conducted by a small group of staff in the Department of Computer Science that utilised the abstracts of the nominated outputs from the exercise described in Part 4.1.a.ii. and the REF 2021 UoA descriptors, to identify the closest fit.

Again, those UoAs that were identified as being able to support a 9.99 FTE/ 25 output submission were flagged for further consideration, and comparison, against those UoAs identified through the output nomination exercise.

b) Decision-Making and Communication:

Using the evidence and criteria set out in section a, above, the following decisions were/will be made regarding allocation of volume-contributing contracts to UoAs:

- i. Contracts running within 2024-25 academic year: For the pilot test of the use of the HESA record to determine volume, the REF 2021 sub-panel UoAs aligned to departments were used for the REFUOA2029 field. These data do not fall within the REF 2029 census period or contribute to the determination of the volume calculation for submission.
- ii. Contracts running within 2025-26 academic year, onwards: For academic year 2025-26 onwards, individual contracts will be assigned to the most prevalent UoA identified for the research associated with the contract-holder through each of the exercises described above (Part 4.1.a). Where more than one UoA is identified, the UoA identified most often will be selected. Where this UoA is not one of the UoAs identified for submission by AU, the closest UoA by disciplinary fit to those identified for submission by AU, will be selected.

- iii. The UoA allocation of the contract of any newly recruited member of REF 2029 volume measure contributing staff will be determined by the indication of UoA alignment by staff through the output nomination exercises described in Part 5.1.
- iv. Future mapping of alignment between research activity and disciplinary areas: The approaches used to allocate volume-contributing contracts to UoAs above (Part 4.1.a), would also be used in future as required e.g. following the publication of the REF 2029 UoA descriptors; in the event of changes in organisational structure; following further development of the research portfolio; in the event of issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Communications regarding the allocation of volume-contributing contracts to UoAs are as follows:

- i. The approach taken in the exercises described in Part 4.1.a. was discussed with the REF Monitoring Group and Associate Deans for Research in March 2025; the Heads of Department and Department/School/Institute Directors of Research in July 2025; and members of University Senate (November 2025).
- ii. The results of the exercises described in Part 4.1.a. were compiled by the REF & Research Monitoring Manager and presented to members of the REF Monitoring Group (RMG).
- iii. The results of the output nomination exercise were compiled and presented to Heads of Department/School/Institute and their Directors of Research in July 2025.
- iv. And the findings and recommendations of all of the exercises described in Part 4.1.a. were considered by the REF Monitoring Group.
- v. The approach, findings and recommendations of all of the exercises described in Part 4.1.a. were then presented to the REF Submission Group for consideration and discussion in March 2026.
- vi. After discussion at Department/School/Institute or UoA level, followed by consideration by the Unit Oversight Groups (UOG – A & B, and UOG – C & D), the recommended UoA allocations for 2025-26 academic year will be proposed by the Research Monitoring Group (RMG) and confirmed by REF Submission Group (RSG) before the HESA submission in October 2026. (See the schematic diagram in [Part 5.2.a](#) for an illustration of this management structure).
- vii. Heads of Department and individual volume-contributing staff members will be informed of the UoA allocation of their volume-contributing staff contract as a courtesy, whilst emphasising that this allocation is simply for the calculation of volume for REF 2029, based on the contract type, and that the UoA allocation has no implications for the individuals concerned, including in terms of expectations or restrictions on the submission of outputs to REF 2029; nor does this allocation have any relevance for the individual regarding performance review or promotion.
- viii. Any future change of UoA allocation for volume-contributing staff contracts would also be conveyed to Heads of Department and the staff member concerned, as per step vii., above.

4.2 Staff, Committees, and Training:

a) **Roles and Responsibilities:**

- i. The REF & Research Monitoring Manager will compile the results of the initial review of the UoA allocation exercises.
- ii. The findings and recommendations of the initial allocation exercises will be considered and agreed by the REF Monitoring Group (RMG; advisory; Chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation), before being presented to the REF

Submission Group (RSG; decision making; Chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, and described in full in Part 5.2.a.v) to review the approach and consider the proposed UoA allocations.

- iii. The proposed UoA allocations will then be discussed with Heads of Department/School/Institute, Directors of Research and/or UoA leads (advisory).
- iv. The proposed UoA allocations will also be considered by the Unit Oversight Groups (UOGs; advisory).
- v. The Research Monitoring Group (RMG; advisory) will subsequently update and finalise their recommendations regarding UoA allocations and present them to the REF Submission Group (RSG; decision making). RSG will have the final decision on UoA allocation.
- vi. UoA allocations will be cascaded down to Heads of Department and to the individuals with volume-contributing contracts, and the REFUOA2029 field of the HESA return will be completed accordingly.

b) Training:

In addition to the training outlined in Part 3.2.b. of this CoP, staff involved with REF advisory and decision-making processes undertake additional training, including regarding responsible research assessment and diversity of outputs.

4.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA):

- i. At this stage of the CoP development, the EIA conducted regarding the allocation of volume-contributing contracts to UoAs is an initial qualitative assessment.
- ii. The allocation of volume-contributing (SRR and RI) contracts to a UoA should have no implication (either positive or negative) for the staff associated with those contracts because it has no impact on the ability of any eligible contracts (regardless of whether or not they contribute to the volume measure) to contribute their research to the REF submission, and nor does it influence the UoA that the research can be submitted to. Nevertheless, quantitative EIAs will be conducted to identify any potential inadvertent discrimination and/or identify any positive outcomes or opportunities to advance equality. The EIAs will include data from all staff on both a teaching and research, and a research-only contract. These EIAs will analyse data for all protected characteristics, where available, including data related to Welsh-language capabilities, and full-time and part-time working.
- iii. These EIAs will then compare such characteristics at a UoA level against the teaching and research and research-only population as a whole.
- iv. To facilitate EIA analysis, benchmark data were collected after the results of the exercises described in Part 4.1.a.i, compiled by the REF & Research Monitoring Manager in September 2025. This data collection will be repeated in September 2026 and September 2027, to enable EIAs to be conducted to assess any changes in the staff populations over the HESA staff record REF 2029 staff-volume contributing years.
- v. Where an identified proportion of the population within the EIAs is so small (under 5) that individual staff members could be identified, and where this also significantly affects the reported percentages, the EIA will simply acknowledge this and highlight the instance as having a notable impact on a specific group but will not include any specific figures.
- vi. The purpose of the EIAs is to help AU identify any potential inadvertent discrimination in REF 2029 processes and pinpoint policies/ practices with a positive impact or opportunities to advance equality.

- vii. If potential discrimination is found, AU will take action to change the policy/ practice or justify retaining it within legal constraints. Such action could include altering the UoA allocation of a staff contract, based on the evidence available through the exercises described in Part 4.1.a.i.1. and Part 5.1.d., where more than one UoA was identified as a possible fit.
- viii. All completed EIAs will be included in the appendices of the final CoP.

Part 5: Selecting outputs

The Research Excellence Framework (REF 2029) is the UK's system for assessing the excellence of research in UK higher education institutions (HEIs) via a process of expert review in disciplinary-based units of assessment (UoAs). During any given REF cycle, HEIs produce more research outputs than can reasonably be considered by these expert review panels, and hence the outputs submitted for the assessment of research quality must be selected by HEIs. This section of the Code of Practice (CoP) outlines how Aberystwyth University will make that selection.

The expectation of REF 2029 is that submissions include the highest quality research across all the disciplines in which an HEI is active. Output quality will therefore be the primary consideration for the AU REF 2029 submission; but UoA submissions should also be representative of the subject range and diversity of research activities undertaken during the REF 2029 cycle (- described in the outline of research activity within the submitting unit, and discussed within a statement of representation).

The number of outputs required for the [Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding \(CKU\)](#) component of a UoA submission is determined by the volume measure during the census period (i.e. the average CONFTE of the relevant REFQUALCON contracts assigned to a REFUOA2029 field; discussed in [Parts 2](#) and [3](#) of this CoP) multiplied by 2.5 (rounded to the nearest whole number of outputs, with values of 0.5 being rounded upwards).

Outputs [eligible for consideration for REF 2029](#) can be produced by any staff who have an expectation of research within their contracts (including research-enabling staff) and have a demonstrable and substantive link (as distinct from the REF 2021 'substantive connection') to Aberystwyth University within the REF 2029 assessment period. Unlike previous REF exercises, outputs do not need to be generated solely by staff with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) and Research Independence (RI) whose contracts determine the volume measure within the census period (described in [Parts 2](#) and [3](#) of this CoP), and nor do outputs have to be submitted to the UoA associated with the author's volume-contributing contract. An eligible output can also be submitted to more than one UoA within AU if it is of appropriate quality and is aligned with the disciplinary areas defined by the REF 2029 descriptors of those UoAs.

5.1 Policies and Procedures:

a) Selection of outputs for submission

- i. Research active colleagues submit outputs to the University's current research information system ([Pure](#)) once accepted for publication/ public distribution, and will use Pure to propose up to six outputs for REF submission, along with an indication (for each output) of up to three UoAs that the output(s) most closely align with.
- ii. To minimise the risk of self-exclusion and enhance representation, the process of self-nomination (step i., above) will also be supplemented by screening of output long-lists to identify and prioritise outputs for peer review. This screening will be conducted at UoA Submission Group and/or Unit Oversight Group level, as appropriate.
- iii. The outputs of current staff will be considered for submission prior to any outputs from staff with contracts previously held with the institution. (See also section 5.1.c.iii below)

- iv. Preliminary decisions on an output's eligibility for REF³ will be indicated by the REF & Research Monitoring Manager and confirmed by the appropriate Unit Oversight Group of an individual's home department.
- v. The underpinning principle for output submission is one of quality – that we will submit the best items available to a UoA. Any outputs proposed for submission will be assessed for quality and fit by the relevant UoA Submission Group(s) for the UoAs proposed. Outputs can also be cross-referred to other potentially-relevant UoA Submission Groups as appropriate, for example in the case of multi-disciplinary or interdisciplinary research.

b) Identifying substantive link to outputs

- i. A substantive link to an output will be identified through an individual employed on an eligible contract, as defined in the [REF 2029 Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding \(CKU\) guidance](#), where there are no more than 15 authors listed on the output.
- ii. Where more than 15 authors are listed, a substantive link will be recognised where it can be clearly demonstrated that the individual contracted by the institution has made a significant research contribution (SRC) to the output. Further guidance on demonstrating a SRC will be forthcoming from REF 2029 before the end of 2026, after which this AU CoP will be updated accordingly. In the meantime, if nominating an output with more than 15 co-authors, colleagues will be asked to provide a short narrative statement describing their contribution to the output, which in the case of written work should also note if they are the lead or corresponding author.

c) Selecting outputs where the substantive link is via former staff

- i. REF 2029 seeks to decouple the link between individual staff members and unit submissions, and requires submissions to be based on research excellence whilst also considering representation of the subject range and diversity of research activities undertaken in the REF cycle. Any output produced by a member of staff on an eligible contract (as defined in the CKU guidance) within the REF 2029 census publication period will therefore be considered for submission by AU, including outputs produced during the REF cycle by staff subject to compulsory redundancy. However, outputs where the substantive link occurred before the submitted output was made publicly available, will not be eligible for submission where the author was subject to compulsory redundancy (in accordance with section 6.7.2 of the following REF 2029 guidance, <https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/section-4-contributions-to-knowledge-and-understanding-cku-guidance/>).
- ii. The outputs of current staff will initially be considered for submission prior to any outputs of staff with contracts previously held with the institution.
- iii. Where the quality of the UoA submission may be enhanced and/or where the submission based on the outputs of current staff does not adequately represent the subject range and diversity of research activities undertaken in the REF cycle and could be enhanced without compromising output quality, the outputs of staff with contracts previously held with the institution will be considered for submission.
- iv. The implications of steps ii) and iii) above will be assessed for representativeness as outlined in 5.1.e, -f and -g below, and would include conducting equality impact assessments to compare the characteristics of staff associated with outputs proposed for submission versus those of the wider pool; this would include analysis of contract status and type (e.g. current/former staff, and permanent/fixed-term, and full-time/part-time).

³ That is, whether it meets the definition of 'research' as given by REF, as well as meeting the criteria for eligible outputs identified by REF. This might for example include decisions over whether an output is eligible because of the date when it was made publicly available.

d) Assigning outputs to UoA/s:

The following steps outline the processes for assigning outputs to UoAs, each step of which is designed to support outputs potentially aligned to single UoAs whilst also supporting the fair treatment and equal consideration of interdisciplinary research where multiple UoAs may potentially be relevant:

- i. The UoA(s) proposed by the nominating individual (up to 3 UoAs nominated per output) will be considered in the first instance as the most appropriate UoA(s) to which an output should be assigned.
- ii. The language modelling described in Part 4.1.a.iii. will be used to further inform the most appropriate UoA(s) for output assignment.
- iii. The Unit Oversight Groups (UOG – for panels A&B, and UOG – for panels C&D) will consider the recommendation of the UoA Submission Group(s) (USGs) regarding the most appropriate UoA(s) to which an output should be assigned. The leads for each USG are members of the relevant UOG, and the Chair of each UOG is also in attendance in the counterpart UOG; this structure (described further in section 5.2) provides fora for open consideration of output recommendations from individual (and multiple) USGs, and another formal mechanism (in addition to step i, above) of highlighting potential interdisciplinary outputs for consideration by other USGs.
- iv. Only in exceptional circumstances would an output be considered for submission to more than two UoAs in the AU REF 2029 submission; such a proposal must be supported by a narrative case.
- v. The RSG will have the final decision regarding which UoA(s) an output should be assigned to, on the recommendations made by the Unit Oversight Groups (UOG) and the REF Monitoring Group (RMG).

e) Procedures for supporting diversity of outputs

AU respects the disciplinary judgement of its authors and does not employ an output production strategy for staff to adhere to. Therefore, the production of any research output type is supported, and no research output type is treated any less favourably than another within the institution. This also applies to the language in which any output is produced; the production of outputs in Welsh or in British Sign Language (BSL) are not treated any less favourably than those produced in any other language (see section h for further details of how this will be achieved).

Regular Pure training sessions are held throughout each year, including bespoke sessions within departments, to support colleagues in the recording and nomination of outputs (produced in any format) via Pure. Reports on the range of output formats recorded on Pure, and their relative proportions, will be made available to UoA Submission Group leads and Unit Oversight Groups (UOGs) for information when considering the subject range and diversity of research activities for the UoA.

AU colleagues involved in advisory or decision-making roles in REF 2029 will undertake training to help promote awareness of the diversity of research practice across and within disciplines, and to support the equitable recognition of diverse forms of research and research outputs (including through interdisciplinary research) within REF 2029. Support is also available and provided by the AU Responsible Research Assessment Group (RRAG).

f) Procedures for ensuring submissions are representative of the research undertaken within the submitting unit during the REF period:

Output quality is the primary consideration for the AU submission to the Research Excellence Framework, REF 2029. Alongside this, HEIs are also required to ensure that the submitted outputs are reflective of the research strategies and structures, the diversity of research outputs, and contributions, collaborations and partnerships of the submitting unit and the unit's research strategies. Further guidance is still to be published by REF on this matter (at which point this CoP will be updated).

However, at the present time, it is envisaged that this balance will be achieved at AU using various lines of evidence to explore the range of research activities, topics, and research outputs and associated information for UoAs. This will include analysis of outputs recorded on Pure, analysis of outputs and associated information using SciVal, and language modelling analysis applied to outputs (e.g. as investigated in the allocation of contracts to UoAs (Part 4.1.a.iii)).

Analysis of all outputs produced by AU staff members identified as holding teaching and research and research only contracts since 1 Jan 2021, as recorded in Pure, was conducted in July 2025, this being at a point over half-way through the REF 2029 assessment period. This analysis identified that articles made up 65% of all completed outputs, with book chapters being the next most completed output type in the Pure records at that time (9%). Similar analysis will be conducted on the nominated output population and the population of outputs selected for submission, as the REF cycle progresses.

To minimise bias during any such analysis, researchers and research-enabling staff will be encouraged to ensure that the record of outputs recorded on Pure extends beyond the outputs nominated for consideration for REF 2029 submission, to include all outputs. Regular Pure training sessions are offered to support this, including bespoke sessions as required.

UoA Submission Groups (USG), the UoA leads, Directors of Research, and the Unit Oversight Groups (UOG – A&B, and UOG – C&D) will also use their expertise and knowledge of the research undertaken, of the researchers and their structures, and of the diversity of outputs, coupled with the insight from the analysis outlined above, to assess whether the outputs proposed for submission are representative of the research activity undertaken by a given UoA.

g) *Policies and procedures for responsible research assessment practice*

AU is committed to responsible research assessment, and these principles underpin assessments made as part of our preparations for REF 2029 submission. AU is a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA; signed in 2020), and is aligned to the principles of the Leiden Manifesto and the four core commitments of The Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA). Expert peer review is the primary method of research assessment for REF. Where metrics are used, this is done in accordance with our responsible use of metrics commitments and used to complement (not replace) peer review, or applied following REF 2029 sub-panel guidance (-scheduled for publication by the end of 2026; metrics were used by 11 of the 34 sub-panels within REF 2021 to inform assessments).

Invitations to nominate outputs for consideration for REF 2029 will be circulated to all eligible staff, encouraging the nomination of the author/producer's highest quality outputs regardless of format. The subject range and diversity of research activities within the nominated/assessed outputs will be compared to the eligible outputs in the pool, to assess the research diversity. EIA assessments will also be conducted on the protected characteristics and contract type (e.g. current/former staff, and permanent/fixed-term, and full-time/part-time) of the AU staff associated with the nominated/assessed outputs compared to the eligible pool and to the characteristics of other categories of staff at AU.

Until the final REF 2029 guidance is issued (at which point this CoP will be reviewed and updated), each eligible nominated output will be assessed using the REF 2021 panel guidance

and criteria of originality, significance and rigour, by at least two reviewers, and discussed by a review panel for the relevant UoA(s) to finalise the assessment outcome. In cases where UoA Submission Groups feel they have insufficient expertise to be able to assess the output (e.g. due to the language in which the output is produced or due to lack of technical expertise in the subject matter), the output can be referred to another UoA Submission Group for assessment, or a suitably qualified internal or external reviewer can be used (subject to agreement by the REF Monitoring Group). Any assessment scores allocated to outputs through this process will only be used to inform the composition of the AU REF 2029 submission and will not be used by AU for any other purpose, including as part of any performance review or promotion of staff.

The aim of this review process is to identify the strongest outputs for submission to REF 2029, whilst reflecting the subject range and diversity of research activities undertaken during the REF 2029 cycle. To reflect the diversity of our research and of our researchers, the number of outputs associated with a single eligible contract is not normally expected to exceed the REF 2029 recommended maximum of 5 outputs.

The UoA Submission Groups (USGs) and Unit Oversight Groups (UOGs) will comprise sufficient membership to enable an informed judgment on the quality of outputs across the sub-fields within the USG (or across the scope of the relevant UOG) and wherever possible will seek to reflect the diversity of the research activity and researchers aligned to that unit/main panel. Training in general EDI matters including unconscious bias, and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and information security, will be kept updated by all reviewers and USG and UOG members, in addition to receiving training in responsible research assessment and output assessment for REF, in the diversity of outputs and research practice, and in panel assessment.

h) ***Procedures for ensuring that outputs in British Sign Language (in England, Wales, and Scotland) and Welsh (in Wales) are not treated less favourably in output selection***

AU respects the disciplinary judgement of its authors and does not employ an output production strategy for staff to adhere to. The production and consideration of outputs in Welsh or in British Sign Language (BSL) are not treated any less favourably than those produced in any other language, including English. It is the quality of an output (in REF terms of Originality, Significance, and Rigour) which will indicate the suitability of the output for inclusion in the REF 2029 submission.

REF 2029 Panels will have in place specific provision for the assessment of outputs in Welsh.

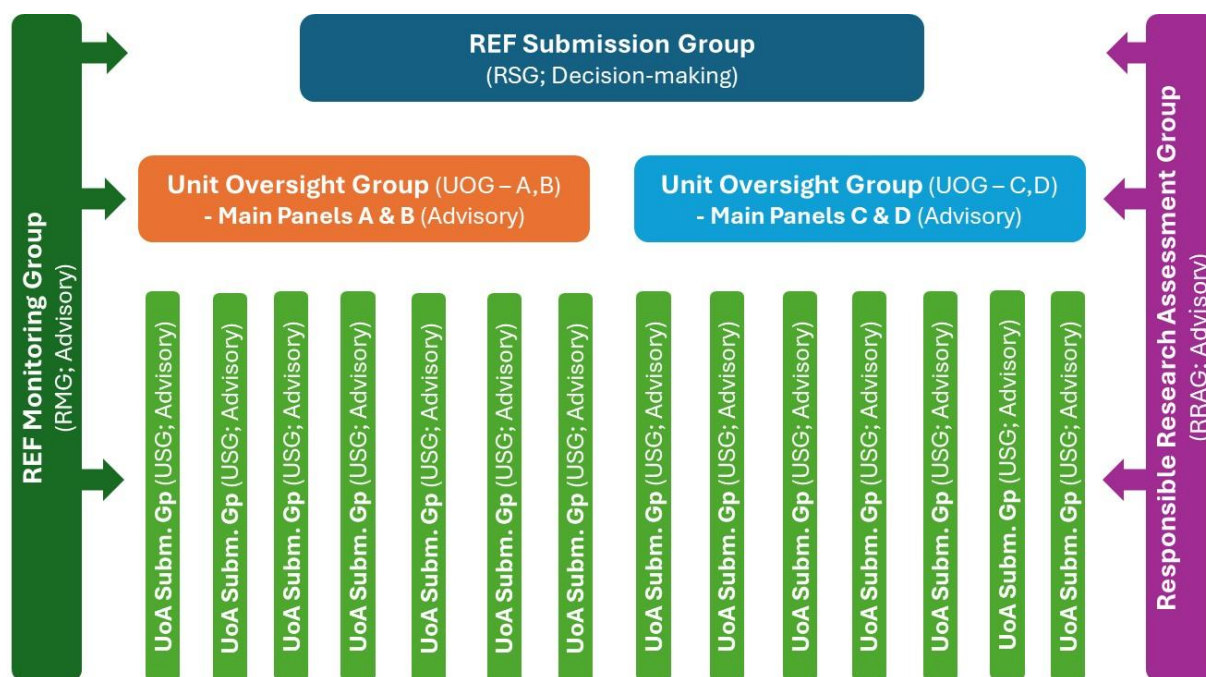
Peer review is the primary means of assessing the quality of outputs at AU, with peer review being conducted in the language in which the output is presented. Reviewers will be trained as outlined in section e, and with particular reference to the status of the Welsh language. Each of the Unit Submission Groups and Unit Oversight Groups will be supported in their assessment of Welsh language outputs.

In addition to the self-nomination of outputs described in Step 5.1.a.i, to minimise the risk of self-exclusion of Welsh language outputs and enhance representation, the process of self-nomination (step i., above) will also be supplemented by screening of output long-lists to identify and prioritise outputs for peer review. This screening will be conducted at Unit Submission Group and/or Unit Oversight Group level, as appropriate.

The draft CoP was shared specifically with colleagues in the AU Centre for Welsh Language Services, and with both Assistant Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellors for the Welsh Language, to invite their feedback and discussion regarding the draft CoP for REF 2029. A Welsh language impact assessment (WLIA) was conducted for this CoP in accordance with AU's statutory duty to consider the impact of all policy decisions on the Welsh language under the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards (No. 6) Regulations 2017. This WLIA is presented in Appendix section 6.1.

5.2 Staff, Committees, and Training:

- a) **Roles and Responsibilities:** The structures involved in implementing the processes outlined in this section (Part 5) of the CoP are described below (Part 5.2.a.i-v) and represented in the following schematic diagram:



- i. **UoA Submission Groups (USG; Advisory role)** – each USG is chaired by a UoA Lead, with expert membership spanning the subject range and diversity of research activities for the UoA. Each USG conducts and coordinates the output review process, producing a ranked list of recommended outputs and reserve items (including supporting evidence for weightings and significant contribution to research) based on the assessment of research quality and representation of the subject range and research activity.
- ii. **Unit Oversight Groups (UOG; Advisory role)** – two groups with oversight of individual UoA Submission Groups (USGs) for REF 2029 Main Panels A and B combined (**UOG – A&B**; Chaired by the Assistant Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) for the Faculty of Sciences), and Main Panels C and D combined (**UOG – C&D**; Chaired by the Assistant Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) for the Faculty of Humanities). The UOG Chairs are also in attendance in the counterpart UOG. Each UOG is comprised of expert membership spanning the subject range and diversity of research activities for the AU UoAs within their respective REF 2029 Main Panels, and their role includes consideration of the recommendations of USGs, including assessment of the representation of USG submissions.
- iii. **Responsible Research Assessment Group (RRAG; Advisory role)** – Chaired by the AU Research Culture Lead. RRAG provides support and guidance regarding responsible research assessment at AU, including to USGs and UOGs preparing REF 2029 submissions for consideration by the AU REF Submission Group.

- iv. **Research Monitoring Group (RMG; Advisory role)** – Chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation, supported by the REF and Research Monitoring Manager (RMG professional services lead) and the Director of Research Excellence and Impact (RMG academic lead). Within this process, RMG provides technical and strategic support and guidance to USGs and UOGs preparing REF 2029 submissions, reviewing USG and UOG recommendations and materials prior to consideration by the REF Submission Group.
- v. **REF Submission Group (RSG; Decision-making role)** – Chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. The RSG receives reports and recommendations from the RMG, considers and makes decisions on key elements of the REF submission, and approves the University's REF submission.

b) Training:

In addition to the training outlined in Part 3.2.b. of this CoP, staff involved with REF advisory and decision-making processes, and reviewing outputs, also undertake additional training, including regarding responsible research assessment and diversity of outputs.

5.3 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA):

At this stage of the CoP development, the EIA conducted regarding the selection of outputs for submission to REF 2029 is an initial qualitative assessment. Output quality is the primary consideration for the AU REF 2029 submission, where output quality is defined by REF as being based on assessment of Originality, Significance and Rigour. However, it is important to acknowledge that research outputs are generated for many reasons and for varied audiences, and that not every output that is produced is suitable (or necessarily intended) for REF. Research outputs that are not selected for REF remain valuable in other contexts and for other purposes. Whether or not an output is included within the AU REF 2029 submission should not, therefore, be taken as any indication of either the quality of the output and the associated research, or as a reflection on the staff member(s) producing the output.

The initial EIA notes that for REF 2029, outputs are decoupled from individuals (it is outputs that are submitted to REF, not people), and hence there should be no adverse effects from selection processes for individuals or protected groups. The eligibility of outputs and the existence of a substantive link also relates to the outputs, not to individuals, and this decoupling of outputs and individuals also means that the allocation of outputs to UoAs has no implications for individuals.

Furthermore, any assessment scores allocated to outputs through the process described in Part 5 will only be used to inform the composition of the AU REF 2029 submission and will not be used by AU for any other purpose, including as part of any performance review or promotion of staff. The process of output selection is therefore neutral (i.e. has no impact, positive or negative) on staff. Nevertheless, in future, quantitative EIAs will be conducted to identify any potential inadvertent discrimination and/or identify any positive outcomes or opportunities to advance equality. A combination of self-nomination of outputs by researchers and screening of eligible outputs by Unit Oversight and/or Unit Submission Groups will be used, to circumvent potential issues of self-exclusion of outputs. Assessments will be made of the representativeness of the submission in terms of subject range and research activity.

Part 6: Appendices

6.1 Equality Impact Assessment and Welsh Language Impact Assessment

The AU REF 2029 Code of Practice (CoP) is a living document which is expected to evolve during the REF 2029 cycle, including in response to Equality Impact assessments (EIAs) and Welsh Language Impact Assessments (WLIAs) when developing and applying the AU CoP, and in response to future guidance yet to be published by REF 2029 (e.g. regarding the future maintenance and approval of CoP mentioned in section 13.7 of the REF 2029 CoP guidance). The use of EIAs and WLIAs is an iterative process which also evolves through the REF cycle.

During the development of the CoP, the core EIA questions (set out below) were considered to assess whether the REF-related policies and processes outlined in the AU CoP demonstrated due regard to AU's Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). This approach was applied to consider decisions regarding i) identifying staff contracts with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR), ii) determining Research Independence (RI), iii) allocating contracts to UoAs, and iv) output selection. These core EIA questions will also be considered in future when applying or updating the AU REF 2029 Code of Practice:

Core EIA questions

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination
 - Could this process or decision disproportionately exclude or disadvantage people with protected characteristics?
 - Are any criteria, systems, or practices indirectly discriminatory (that is to say, neutral on the surface but unequal in effect)?
 - Have reasonable adjustments been considered or applied where appropriate?
 - Are there any legacy practices or default assumptions that could disadvantage certain groups?
- Advancing equality of opportunity
 - Have barriers to access or participation been identified and addressed?
 - Do all relevant staff groups have a fair opportunity to contribute to, benefit from, or be considered in this process?
 - Have we used disaggregated data to monitor representation, participation, or outcomes?
 - Are there opportunities to design this process in a way that proactively supports inclusion or recognises diverse contributions?
 - Have steps been taken to minimise over-reliance on metrics or conventions that may structurally exclude some groups?
- Fostering good relations
 - Have relevant staff groups or equality networks been consulted or engaged?

- Has the process been clearly and transparently communicated, with reasons and routes for feedback?
- Could the approach help build confidence in fairness and trust across different groups?
- Are staff encouraged to raise concerns or suggestions in a constructive and supported way?

EIAs will include quantitative data regarding the profile of various AU staff cohorts (including protected characteristics, Welsh language capability, and full-time versus part-time status) compared against benchmark data, to permit analysis of the outcomes of application of the CoP and of any further development of the CoP to mitigate potential risks and adverse outcomes.

6.2 CoP development, engagement and feedback

The CoP for REF 2029 builds on the experience and processes of the AU REF 2021 CoP where possible.

The AU REF 2029 CoP was developed and refined through the input of various departments, university groups and committees, including protected groups and staff networks, and via various engagement and feedback opportunities, as outlined in the table below.

Summer to Autumn 2025 - Shaping of early draft CoP processes	Elements of the CoP and the potential processes involved were presented to Associate Deans for Research, Heads of Department/School/Institute (HoDs) and their Directors of Research (DoRs).
Winter to Spring 2026	Development of a full written draft of the CoP; considered by the Assistant Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellors for Research, the REF and Research Monitoring Manager, the Interim Director of Research Excellence and Impact, and Human Resources. The revised draft CoP was then shared with the following groups, and feedback sought (including via an anonymous feedback mechanism open to all AU staff): • AU Senior Executive • AU Centre for Welsh Language Services, and both Assistant Faculty Pro Vice-Chancellors for the Welsh Language • Joint Faculty Research Leadership Group meeting • Trade Unions • Responsible Research Assessment Group (RRAG) • Protected Groups and other key groups (including Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Staff Network; Disability and Wellbeing Network; Equality Champions Network; LGBT Staff Network; Peri/Post/Menopause Support Group; Women in Research Network; Early Career Researcher Network) • Direct e-mail to all staff from the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation sharing the draft CoP and the anonymous feedback mechanism, inviting comments, and also sharing invitations to in-person engagement sessions • E-mail to AU 'Research-active' staff list, sharing draft CoP and anonymous feedback mechanism, and sharing invitations to in-person engagement sessions • In-person engagement sessions led by the Director of Research Excellence and Impact and the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation • Following consideration of feedback via the various groups and methods listed above, a revised version of the CoP, was presented to the Research and Innovation Committee, seeking any further comments and a recommendation for submission • Final version of CoP considered for approval by REF Submission Group (RSG) (ahead of submission to REF 2029 by noon on 15th May)