

Abertay REF2029 Code of Practice

Institution name: Abertay University

Date of submission: 11th May 2026

Date of revision: 18th August 2026

Date of SFC approval: 18th September 2026

If you would like this REF Code of Practice (CoP) document in a different format (e.g. large print, braille) or need any assistance to access or understand the policy/procedure please contact your Abertay Faculty/Service designated HR partner at PeopleServices@abertay.ac.uk.

Part 1: Introduction

1. How your CoP supports the principles of:

- **Robustness** – *Explain how the policies and processes set out in the CoP ensure that contracts identified as contributing to the volume measure reliably reflect the responsibilities of staff.*

Our *University Strategy 2025-30* affirms our commitment to developing and sustaining an inclusive and supportive culture, welcoming and retaining staff from a diverse range of backgrounds, and inspiring our staff to achieve their full potential. As a modern University, research excellence continues to develop at pace across the institution and research forms a significant responsibility for increasing numbers of our academic staff. However, for many valued academic staff, research is not a significant part of their work, which is focussed on teaching, often combined with professional practice, knowledge transfer, outreach, and/or organisational work. In line with the REF2029 guidance, this latter group of staff will not contribute to the volume measure for REF2029. This does not detract from the vital part they play in Abertay's core purpose: offering transformational opportunities through our approach to education and enabling our students to achieve their potential.

The University's approach to the REF will:

- Take account of our current and historical context, our current operating environment and our strategic aims.
- Recognise that academic roles vary and value different types of academic role and varied career paths.
- Support academic staff development, including development of research independence.
- Be underpinned by equality, inclusivity and fairness, ensuring that all staff are treated with dignity and respect. Specifically, our approach will ensure that there is no unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation due to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity; and that part-time and fixed-term employees are treated no less favourably than comparable full-time and permanent employees (and vice versa).
- Ensure transparency, consistency and accountability in all our decision-making processes in relation to REF.
- Be the same for all submitted Units of Assessment (UoAs; see UoA32 exception for Research Only contracts – Part 3), as our employment and management practices do not vary substantially.

This REF2029 Code of Practice (CoP) was developed in consultation with a *REF CoP Working Group*. Membership (5 female; 3 male) is composed of a cross section of academic and research staff and trade union representatives from both UCU and Unite, specifically: an early and a mid-career academic; a senior academic (and UoA Champion); a Head of Department; a UCU representative; a Unite representative; the *Head of Research Degrees, Impact and Researcher Development*, the *Vice-Principal (Research and Innovation)*; and the *Deputy Director of People and Culture* (Chair). The Group was nominated by, and reports to, the University REF Steering Group.

The CoP was subject to recommendation for approval by the University *REF Steering Group*, the *Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC)*, recommendation by *Senate*, and final approval by the *University Court*. The draft CoP has been published internally, discussed at consultation events open to all academic and research staff, discussed by Heads of Department at Department Meetings and by the *Senior Leadership Team*, considered by the *Abertay Lead Voices* and *Staff Wellbeing Engagement and Empowerment Teams*, and open to comment through a dedicated CoP@abertay.ac.uk email address, to seek feedback to inform any necessary refinement to the CoP, thereby ensuring equality, inclusivity and fairness in our approach.

The revised CoP was submitted to the *Scottish Funding Council /REF team* by 11th May 2026 for approval. Thereafter, the University was required to amend the CoP following feedback, before final approval (18th September 2026) and external publication.

By adopting a fully consultative and transparent approach to developing our REF CoP we ensure that the policies and processes it sets out, reliably identify contracts that contribute to the volume measure and accurately reflect staff responsibilities.

- **Transparency** – *Detail how the CoP is communicated to all staff, including those on leave of absence or based outside the UK. Ensure accessibility by providing information in various formats and through appropriate channels. Highlight any additional resources (FAQs, web pages) to support staff understanding. An up-to-date version of the CoP should be published and available externally.*

The University has established REF2029 intranet pages, which are publicised through ARC VivaEngage (our internal RKE&I social networking tool), *MyAbertay* intranet newsfeed, *Graduate School* organised briefing events, and Faculty Away Day meetings. The draft CoP has been published on the intranet, in addition to holding consultation events open to all staff. These are publicised via all staff email, the *MyAbertay* intranet newsfeed and the Abertay newsletter. In addition to the consultation sessions, staff have been invited to submit any comments, suggestions or queries to CoP@abertay.ac.uk. Further consultation has also involved academic managers and leaders (*Heads of Department* and *Faculty Vice-Principals*) and the University *RKEC*. All comments and suggestions, whether via open sessions, email or other routes, were considered by the *REF CoP Working Group* before proposing the final CoP for recommendation by *Senate*, and final approval by the *University Court*.

Staff requiring information/ documentation in a different accessible format (e.g. large print, braille) or needing assistance to access or understand Abertay REF2029 policy/procedures can contact their Faculty/Service designated HR partner at PeopleServices@abertay.ac.uk.

The final CoP will be available to all staff on the REF2029 *MyAbertay* intranet page and will also be published on the University's external REF webpage once approved by SFC.

In addition, *Heads of Department* and/or *People Services* have communicated directly with academic or research staff on extended leave of absence, sabbatical, secondment or based outside the UK, via letter and/or email regarding this CoP and will continue to do so on key activity in relation to REF2029.

This CoP does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and is subject to amendment. It is anticipated that the CoP will continue to be updated as preparation for REF2029 proceeds, including updating information about timescales, consultation, Equality

Impact Assessment (EqIA) and communication. The University may also vary any parts of this procedure, including any time limits, as appropriate in any case¹.

Data Protection and Confidentiality: Abertay University will process personal data related to REF 2029 preparation in accordance with the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Personal data used for determining eligibility, research independence, output selection, equality monitoring and appeals will be processed under the lawful basis of Public Task (UK GDPR Article 6(1)(e)), as these activities are necessary for the University's statutory functions and public interest obligations associated with the REF. Where special category data is processed (e.g., equality characteristics used in EqIAs), this will additionally rely on Article 9(2)(g) of the UK GDPR, together with the relevant Schedule 1 conditions of the Data Protection Act 2018 relating to equality monitoring and statutory requirements. All such data will be minimised, securely stored, accessible only to authorised staff, and retained only for the period necessary to meet REF and statutory requirements. Equality related data will be anonymised or aggregated to avoid identification of individuals, particularly in small units.

- **Equity and inclusion** – *Explain how decisions about submissions are fair and impartial supporting a diversity of people and research, where diverse contributions are valued and supported.*

The CoP promotes inclusive research environments where diverse individuals and research contributions are valued and supported, and recognises the wide range of research, roles and people that are essential to promoting an inclusive research environment and ensuring the vitality of the UK's vibrant research system. The CoP has been developed collaboratively with the Abertay academic and research community, subject to institution-wide consultation, recommendation by *Senate*, and final approval by the *University Court*. The criteria therein (Parts 2, 3, 4 and 5) are objective, non-discriminatory and transparent, will be applied consistently, and take due regard of our legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010, and Public Sector Equality Duty including Scottish Specific Duties.

Decisions about submissions are fair and impartial, supporting a diversity of people and research, where diverse contributions are valued and supported. Accountability and inclusivity is ensured through having clearly defined roles and responsibilities for individuals and groups involved in decision making: to identify staff with significant responsibility for research; determine research independence; and in selecting outputs for REF submissions to specific UoAs. Operating criteria and/or terms of reference for individuals, committees, advisory groups and other bodies concerned with these processes, are readily available to all individuals and groups concerned (see Part 6(2)).

A fair and inclusive culture is promoted by ensuring that all those involved in decision making have undertaken appropriate equality, diversity & inclusion training (see Part 2(3)) and that decision outcomes are assessed via EqIAs at key process application stages. Guided by REF2029 requirements, we will provide fair and inclusive representation of the excellent research undertaken by all our researchers.

¹Amendments will be made if required due to any further substantial and relevant changes to REF guidance or to Abertay business operations. The SFC will be notified of any substantial amendments required.

2. Contextualisation within Institutional Policies:

- Describe how this Code of Practice relates to your institution's context on equality, diversity, and inclusion, SPRE and responsible research assessment.

This CoP is aligned with the *University's Equality and Diversity Policy* (see Part 6(2)), which confirms the University's commitment to equality of opportunity in its selection and treatment of employees, to ensuring that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect and to achieving an environment where unlawful discrimination is not tolerated. All staff involved in REF2029 processes are also subject to the *University Bullying and Harassment Guidelines* (see Part 6(2)), which make it clear that the University will not tolerate any form of bullying and harassment and individuals may challenge this without fear of repercussion. The CoP is also aligned with the *University People Strategy* (see Part 6(2)) and our *Research Culture and Environment Policy* (to be approved).

The University holds both *Athena SWAN* and *Race Equality Charter* Bronze awards and continues to take forward associated action plans to further promote gender and race equality. Furthermore, we are part of the pathfinder group of institutions participating in the new *Advance-HE Inclusive Institutions Framework*. The University is a signatory and is fully committed to the principles outlined in the *UK Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*, which sets out the conditions required to create the very best culture (a vision of working practices, roles and responsibilities) for researchers to thrive and thus ensure the continued provision of well-trained, talented and motivated researchers that is essential to the continuation of research excellence. The University *RKEC* oversees the development and delivery of our *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers* action plan (see Part 6(2)), which includes submission of our *Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*. These action plans are integrated into the University's overarching *Equality Action Plan*, which addresses equality, diversity and inclusion across all protected characteristics.

Abertay is committed to responsible research assessment and is a signatory of the *San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment* (DORA) and as such we have eliminated the use of journal-based metrics in funding, appointment, promotion and REF2029 decision making processes - we assess research based on its own merits.

The University has a standard *Equality Impact Assessment* process and guidance, which will be used to assess this CoP and as the basis for all EqlA under this Code.

3. Update on Actions Since REF2021:

- Summarise key actions taken since REF2021 to address issues or recommendations from previous EIAs.

Abertay took an inclusive approach to the REF2021 process - we submitted 80% of our eligible academic staff and every staff member submitted was also involved in teaching. This inclusive approach is central to our long-term plan to embed a research-led culture right across Abertay, underpinning everything we do in research, knowledge-exchange, innovation and teaching; our students have access to research-active tutors and our staff are supported to develop the experience required to advance within their professional fields. Abertay have introduced and refined a number of policies and procedures aimed at improving equal opportunity and good practice for all researchers as part of our *Concordat to Support the Career Development of*

Researchers action plan. The University also undertakes systematic and detailed periodic review of the impact Abertay policies and practices have on EDI for staff involved in research as part of the *Race Equality Charter Mark* (awarded Bronze 2017 and 2020), *Athena SWAN* self-assessment exercises (awarded Institutional Bronze 2015, 2018 and 2024), and going forward the new Advance-HE *Inclusive Institutions Framework*.

Reflecting our ambitions to grow research and expand into new areas, we continue to take an inclusive approach to supporting research excellence. For example, we submitted more staff to REF2021 (REF2014:72; REF2021:117) and to more subject areas (REF2014:7; REF2021:8) than REF2014, and the proportion of female academics submitted improved (REF2014 F:28% and REF2021 F:39%), together with an almost 63% increase in submitted FTEs. Through the introduction of our *Research Culture and Environment Policy* and associated priorities, we continue to make excellent progress in promoting research responsibilities and opportunities across all staff during the current assessment period, particularly in terms of gender equality. No race-related issues were identified in relation to research or REF2021.

The University has refined its *Workload Allocation Model* (2026) with clear guidance for line managers (see Part 6(2)) to ensure that workload for different categories of activity is fairly allocated to academic staff, is discussed and agreed during *Development Discussion* and/or related meetings with line managers, and summary workload allocations for all academic staff are made transparent via internal publication on the intranet web pages. The University is attempting to streamline and normalise some of its REF2029 management and decision-making process since the last REF2021 CoP as we progress with REF2029 preparations.

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

If all your institution's 'teaching and research' (ACEMPFUN 3) contracts in the HESA staff record already comprehensively identify all staff with significant responsibility for research, simply state this here. No further elaboration is needed in this section.

Two tests determine an eligible contract that is qualified for inclusion in the volume measure:

- Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR): for 'teaching and research' contracts (see Part 2).
- Research Independence (RI): for 'research only' contracts (see Part 3).

Contracts meeting either of these tests are marked with the REFQUALCON flag in the HESA Staff record, signifying inclusion in the volume measure.

Staff members holding multiple eligible contracts at Abertay will have their CONFTE calculated across all these contracts.

The contractual status of Abertay academic staff on 'teaching and research' contracts does not accurately identify staff with SRR. Staff with SRR are those for whom explicit time and resources are made available to engage actively in independent research, and that is an expectation of their job role.

1. Policies and Procedures:

- **Criteria for SRR:** *Clearly define the criteria, based upon job role expectations, not past performance. Consider providing examples for consistent interpretation.*

(a) At Abertay, **SRR eligible contracts** are those that fulfil all the following criteria:

- Academic staff with contracts whose primary employment function is to undertake 'teaching and research' (ACEMPFUN 3) activities, as recorded in the HESA Staff record ACEMPFUN field.
- The staff member is on the Abertay payroll within the REF period (i.e. academic years 2025-26, 2026-27 for the relevant HESA Staff record collections).

Academic staff on Teaching only (ACEMPFUN 1) contracts are not eligible to be included in the volume measure calculation.

Abertay do not employ hourly/daily paid contracted staff that would meet the eligibility criteria for significant responsibility for research at the University.

The contracts of fixed-term teaching and research staff who meet the general eligibility criteria, are eligible for inclusion.

The contracts of pensioned staff (i.e. in receipt of a UK HEI pension) who continue in salaried employment with a teaching and research contract and meet the general eligibility criteria, are eligible for inclusion.

Staff employed wholly overseas: the contracts of these staff, including those at overseas campuses not on the Abertay payroll, are not eligible for inclusion.

For staff working in part-time UK employment and partly overseas, the record will reflect only the UK resident employment time.

Exception for normal UK-based employment: if time abroad is part of normal UK-based employment, the CONFTE will not be reduced.

The contracts of staff employed by a UK HEI but based overseas will not be included unless their activity is clearly and directly connected to a UK-based department/unit.

(b) Identifying staff as SRR at Abertay:

From September 2025 and for the purpose of REF2029, eligible academic staff (see Part 2.1(a)) are deemed to have a SRR for the academic year, only where the criteria and processes set out in Part 2.2(a) are met, and those staff are accordingly allocated a portion of time for research activity within the *Workload Plan (WLP)* that is equal or greater than 0.2 full-time equivalent (FTE) or *pro rata* for part-time staff. For the avoidance of doubt, the allocation of time for research according to the criteria and processes set out in Part 2.2(a), determines the staff member as SRR in that academic year.

2. Decision-Making and Communication: *Describe the process, roles, and timelines.*

All **academic staff on 'teaching & research' contracts** are allocated time for categories of activity within the Abertay *Workload Allocation Model (WAM)* operated for each academic year. Workload allocations are planned (WLP) annually to ensure effective delivery of university business commitments and operations as well as to support strategic developments, and are based upon the expectations of contracts as a function of employment. Workloads can be revised during the academic cycle to accommodate any changes in circumstances and/or priorities. The WAM is applied fairly, consistently and without bias, and is clearly communicated and accessible to all staff. Workload allocations for staff are discussed and agreed as part of the bi-annual *Development Discussion* process (see Part 6(2)) and final WLPs are published internally at the end of each academic cycle (normally July of that academic year).

Workload allocations may be planned (WLP) to support research activity, comprising work falling within the definition of research i.e. for the purposes of the REF, *research is defined as a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared*. This includes:

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

Effectively shared includes research that is published, disseminated or made publicly available in the form of assessable research outputs, and confidential reports.

The definition of research excludes:

- the routine testing and routine analysis of materials, components and processes such as for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques
- the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research.

(a) The procedure by which decisions are made to identify eligible staff as SRR each academic cycle, including the timescales for delivering decisions and the method and timescale in which feedback will be provided in respect of the decisions made, are identified below. This is a multi-stage process:

- Eligible academic staff engaging with externally funded research (independent researchers as the principal investigator² and/or co-applicant) are allocated a minimum 20% of their total workload allocation for research and are therefore deemed to have a SRR. Workload allocations are reviewed and approved by the *REF Decisions on Staff and Outputs Group* (final WLPs confirmed normally by July of the academic year).
- The University also endeavours to support internally resourced/funded research in priority, strategic areas from within annual budgets for the Faculties and the Graduate School. Priorities and activities are identified through a combination of top-down and bottom-up planning within the Faculties and are reviewed and agreed at *Faculty Executive* meetings, before final workload allocations are reviewed and approved by the *REF Decisions on Staff and Outputs Group* (final WLPs confirmed normally by July of each academic year). The process is aligned with our *Research Assurance and Accountability Strategy* and reporting to the *Scottish Funding Council*. Eligible academic staff engaging with priority University funded/ resourced research activity are allocated a minimum 20% of their total workload allocation for research, and are therefore identified as SRR.

Workload allocations and research activity are discussed and agreed with individual academic staff during bi-annual *Development Discussion* and/or related meetings with *Heads of Department* and/or *RKE Departmental Leads*. Plans and achievements are recorded within the *Research Plans* of individual staff. Feedback on progress and the previous years achievements are also reviewed and discussed.

Governance and assurance arrangements for workload and funding allocations are implemented through existing Abertay governance structures and processes, specifically the *Senior Leadership Team* (or subsets thereof), the *Research Executive*, Operational Planning processes, the *Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee* (a committee of the University Senate) and associated quarterly and annual reporting processes. Abertay staff should note that allocation as SRR does not constitute assessment of individual performance.

²This will involve supporting a substantive programme of work, enabling the employment of another staff member, and/or undertaking responsibilities equivalent to the established funding schemes that qualify an individual for Research Independence.

- **Multiple Processes (if applicable):** *If different processes are used for different UoAs, outline each and justify any differences.*

Abertay adopts the same approach for all UoAs across the University.

3. Staff, Committees, and Training:

- **Roles and Responsibilities:** *Define roles and responsibilities of individuals and committees, distinguishing between advisory and decision-making roles.*

Unless otherwise stated, designated staff, panels, groups and committees have been appointed on the basis of the individual's office or role in the University and their professional expertise and experience, taking account of the need to separate decision-making and appeal processes, and to distribute workload. Given Abertay's small size, all academic managers and relevant professional staff are involved in our REF2029 processes. For example, the *Principal & Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Principal & University Secretary, Vice-Principal (Research and Innovation)* and *Faculty Vice-Principals* have particular responsibilities in relation to research strategy, line management and governance relevant to their particular roles and are included in relevant groups on that basis. Professional services colleagues have been included on the basis of their expertise and responsibilities for relevant policies, processes, information and advice. For example, *People Services* (PS) colleagues have expertise in law, policy and practice in relation to both people management and equality, diversity and inclusion, as well as roles as HR partners, and experience of previous REF exercises. All appointments to jobs/roles in the University are made in accordance with HR and recruitment policy. Conflicts of interest will be declared and managed; members may be recused where appropriate.

The procedures for appointing designated staff, groups, committees and panels responsible for identifying staff with a SRR are identified below (see Part 6(2) for further information):

- **Code of Practice (CoP) Working Group:** The remit of the Working Group is to develop Abertay University's REF2029 Code of Practice in accordance with the REF and funding bodies' requirements and guidance, whilst taking into account the views from the wider academic/research community at Abertay. Membership is composed of; one early and one mid-career academic, a senior academic (and *UoA Champion Lead*), a *Head of Department*, a UCU representative, a Unite representative, the *Vice-Principal (Research and Innovation)*, the *Head of Research Degrees, Impact & Researcher Development*, and the *Deputy Director of People & Culture* (Chair). The group has an advisory role.
- **Head of Department (HoD):** *Heads of Department* have direct line management responsibility for all academic staff, as those: determining the allocation of workload for specific responsibilities, including research independence and time allocated for research; providing the workload allocation information to the *Faculty Vice-Principals*; communicating provisional WLP and REF decisions to staff; providing support and specific advice on development; and ensuring all relevant information is taken into account. This forms part of their contracted management role. *HoDs* are supported by *RKE Departmental Leads* to provide direct support to 'teaching and research' contract staff in the Department through general RKE guidance and mentorship. Decision making is informed by data related to research and researcher independence, business and operational need, including delivery of the teaching portfolio, as well as development and

delivery of other projects. Planned workload allocations related to research are reviewed annually by the *REF Decisions on Staff and Outputs Group* to confirm appropriate allocation of time for research and other duties. Specific briefings are held for *Heads of Department* and *Faculty Vice-Principals* regarding their critical role in managing academic workload and in supporting staff to develop their research. This is a front-line decision-making role.

- **Unit of Assessment (UoA) Champion Leads** and Groups (deputies/ mentors): The chair of the *REF Steering Group*, through an open call, invited applications from academics offering to act as UoA Champions. All such nominations were accepted as either *UoA Champion Lead*, deputy or mentor, to share the burden of workload and provide opportunities for learning and staff development. The *REF Steering Group* identified *UoA Champion Leads* (the most experienced academics in terms of REF and/or research leadership) from within each UoA Champion group. The Terms of Reference for UoA Champion Leads and group members are available via *MyAbertay*. *UoA Champion Leads* are able to offer advice to *Heads of Department* (should it be required) regarding researcher independence, and offer advisory scores for contribution to knowledge and understanding (CKU) research outputs from the UoA Champion group (STAGE 4). This is an advisory role.
- **Abertay REF Team:** The *Abertay REF Team* are responsible for managing the institution's submission to REF2029. Abertay do not have a dedicated team focussed mainly on REF but rely on input from a core team of four individuals with roles and responsibilities within the *Research, Innovation & Enterprise Support* team and the *Graduate School*. This means that REF preparation and activity can be developed to integrate into normal research support processes and facilities. The core team are: the *Vice-Principal (Research and Innovation)*; the *Scholarly Publications & Research Information Specialist*; the *Head of Research Degrees, Impact & Researcher Development*; and the *Research Grant & REF Development Specialist*. Together they lead the development of strategy, gap-analysis, policy compliance and overall management of the REF submission, and provide information and advice to the *REF Steering Group*. This is an advisory and decision-making role.
- **REF Decisions on Staff and Outputs Group:** The group is chaired by the *Principal and Vice-Chancellor* and is composed of the *Faculty Vice-Principals*, the *Vice-Principal (Research and Innovation)*, the *Director of Finance Infrastructure & Corporate Services*, and a designated HR partner. The group is composed of key *Senior Leadership Team* members (with overall leadership responsibility for the Faculties) and relevant Professional Support and *Senior Leadership Team* members (involved in research data management and supporting HR management and EDI in the Faculties). The Terms of Reference for the group are available via *MyAbertay*. The group conducts an annual review of planned academic and research staff workloads with a particular focus on ensuring a fair, transparent and appropriate research time allocation for individual staff. This cross-institutional group serves to ensure a parity of approach in terms of individual *Head of Department* decisions (approved workloads are communicated back to *Heads of Department*). The group also reviews and confirms Abertay assessment scores/ CKU decisions following review (STAGE 4). These data are available to the *REF Steering Group* and to REF *UoA Champion Leads* as appropriate. This group has a decision-making role.

- **REF Steering Group:** The *REF Steering Group* is chaired by the *Vice-Principal (Research and Innovation)*, and is composed of the *Faculty Vice-Principals*, the *Principal & Vice-Chancellor*, the *Director of People & Culture*, the *Head of Research Degrees, Impact & Researcher Development*, the *Research Grant & REF Development Specialist*, and the *Scholarly Publications & Research Information Specialist*. The Terms of Reference for the Group are available via *MyAbertay*. The REF Steering Group monitors progress on preparations for REF; ensures appropriate development of a REF2029 CoP; ensures development of appropriate infrastructure, facilities and support for REF submission in light of REF and *Scottish Funding Council* guidance; reviews the draft *Strategy, People, and Research Environment Statements* and *Impact Case Studies*; considers the advice of the *EqlA Panel*; considers reports from the *Appeals Panel*; and reviews mock and full REF submissions; and advises the *Senior Leadership Team/ University Executive* on UoA submissions. The Group has both an advisory and decision-making role.
- **Appeals Panel:** The *Appeals Panel* consists of the *Head of Research Degrees, Impact & Researcher Development*, the *Director of People & Culture*, a UCU representative and will be chaired by the *Vice-Principal & University Secretary*. The Panel may also co-opt professors or others who have not been involved in previous decision-making to bring senior academic expertise as required. Hitherto, panel members will not have been involved directly in making decisions regarding SRR, RI or CKU output. Panel membership was proposed by the *REF Code of Practice Working Group* to provide the most senior experience of matters related to the academic, people, culture and governance domains. The *Appeals Panel* Terms of Reference are available via *MyAbertay*. *Appeal Panel* decisions will be reported to the *REF Steering Group*. The Panel has a decision-making and advisory role.
- **Equality impact assessment (EqlA) Panel:** EqlA will be conducted by an independent panel of the *Director of Student & Academic Services* and a HR partner, with advice available from the *Research Grant & REF Development Specialist* as appropriate. An EqlA will be undertaken on the draft CoP prior to submission to SFC, and on the provisional decisions regarding staff with significant responsibility for research, research independence and on selection of outputs, with a view to identifying any differences in impact for groups by gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion and belief, age, disability or sexual orientation, or for those who have been pregnant and/or on maternity, adoption or parental leave during the period covered by REF2029. The EqlA will also assess any differences for those on fixed-term and part-time contracts relative to those on permanent and full-time contracts, respectively. Information about the findings of EqlA with respect to decisions will be submitted to the SFC after the REF submission deadline. The panel reports to the *REF Steering Group* and has an advisory role.
- **REF External Advisors:** *REF External Advisors* will be nominated by *UoA Champion Leads* and group members. The *REF Steering Group* confirm the selection of *REF External Advisors* for specific UoAs from the pool of nominations. The Terms and Conditions for External Advisors are available via *MyAbertay*. *REF External Advisors* will be informed of our *REF Code of Practice* and will be required to have undertaken appropriate ED&I training. *REF External Advisors* will offer an independent assessment of the quality of a selected sample of CKU output, to permit validation of output scores by the *UoA Champion Leads* and the *REF Decisions on Staff and Outputs Group*. This is an advisory role.

- **Principal & Vice-Chancellor:** The *Principal & Vice-Chancellor* of the University will consider and confirm the recommendations made by the *REF Steering Group* regarding the final UoA submissions made to REF2029. This is a decision-making role.

- **Training:** *Detail training provided.*

All Abertay University staff are required to undertake on-line training in Diversity at Work and Unconscious Bias and the University will ensure that all those involved in making REF2029 related decisions have completed these courses before contributing to any decisions regarding staff or outputs. In addition, *Heads of Department* engage in a Leadership and Management Development programme, including specific elements on equality, diversity, inclusion and unconscious bias. All key decision-makers including the *REF Champion Leads*, *Heads of Department* and members of the *REF Steering Group*, the *REF Decisions on Staff and Outputs Group*, and the *Appeals Panel* (who between them include all those advising and making decisions about SRR and RI staff and outputs) will (from 2026) undertake further, tailored training on equality, diversity and inclusion in relation to REF. All decision-makers will complete mandatory training on ED&I, responsible research assessment, confidentiality and data protection. Tailored Abertay workshops on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and REF, facilitated by the *Director of People & Culture*, will be held Summer-Autumn 2026. This timing will ensure that staff have attended before the mock REF process planned for Summer 2027. Further training will be provided if additional needs are identified through EqIA or advice on best practice from REF (RDAP & PDAP). All of the staff listed above will attend the workshop. Should any new staff become involved, a further workshop or individual training will be provided within one month of becoming involved in Abertay's REF2029 processes.

Training criteria: The aim for the combination of the on-line courses and the tailored workshop is to ensure that all those involved in Abertay's REF processes:

- have an understanding of the legal framework for equality, diversity and inclusion
- understand the concepts of discrimination and unconscious bias
- have an awareness of how discrimination and unconscious bias might arise in Abertay's REF processes and how to avoid that, and
- are able to ensure that Abertay's REF processes promote an inclusive environment.

In addition, the tailored workshop provides an opportunity to identify potential improvements to Abertay's REF processes to promote inclusion and prevent discrimination. Any ideas or recommendations generated through the tailored workshops will be considered and may contribute to the refinement of Abertay's REF Code of Practice processes.

Appointed *External Advisors* are required to confirm that they have undertaken equality and diversity and unconscious bias training or to undertake Abertay's online courses.

4. Appeals:

- *Clearly outline how staff can appeal decisions about SRR, with appropriate links and contact details.*

Staff may appeal decisions about SRR and RI, or flag inaccuracies, by raising the issue initially through the *Head of Department* and *Faculty Vice-Principals* for frontline resolution. If

unresolved, staff should contact the chair of the *Appeals Panel* - the *Vice-Principal & University Secretary*, specifying RE. REF Appeals Panel in the Subject, and stating the grounds for review. Staff are reminded not to include unnecessary sensitive data in appeal emails. Staff will be informed of the right to seek review at the same time as a provisional or confirmed decision is communicated to them by their *Head of Department*. The timescales for appeals will be stated and published on the REF *MyAbertay* pages.

Relevant grounds for review will be:

- Relevant information has not been taken into account, including any special circumstances.
- The criteria have not been applied correctly.
- Evidence of another defect in the procedure or application of this CoP.

The review will be undertaken by the *Appeals Panel* which may seek information from the appellant, the relevant *REF Champion Lead(s)* and the *Head of Department* if required, in writing or in person. The appeal review will normally be completed within 1 month of receiving the appeal in writing. The outcome of the review will be communicated to the individual and their *Head of Department* in writing. The decision will be final.

The funding bodies (i.e. the *Scottish Funding Council*) will provide a complaints and investigations process for when individuals believe the approved University CoP has not been followed (where the process above has not led to a satisfactory resolution). The complaints and investigations process will include a requirement (where appropriate) to take corrective actions on submissions where complaints are upheld.

5. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA):

- **EIA Integration:** *Demonstrate how EIA informed SRR identification and policy/procedure development. Provide information on data, findings, and actions taken.*

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has directly informed the development of this CoP and the processes for identifying staff with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR). The EqIA considered workforce data, previous institutional EqIAs (Athena SWAN, Race Equality Charter), our REF2021 submission, workload allocation records, feedback gathered through consultation, and our Abertay research environment and culture. For example, our policies, practices, investment and facilities to support and develop research excellence and impact are available to all academic and research staff, and provide opportunities to advance equality of opportunities and/or eliminate discrimination,

The assessment identified areas where differential impacts could arise - particularly relating to gender, disability, ethnicity, contract type and working pattern, and periods of leave. As a result, several refinements (within the bounds of the REF Guidance (<https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/>)) were incorporated into the CoP and supporting procedures:

- **Clear and equitable SRR criteria**, including pro rated thresholds for part time staff and explicit consideration of career breaks and adjustments.
- **Strengthened consistency in workload allocation**, with annual cross institutional review by the *REF Decisions on Staff and Outputs Group* to mitigate local variation or bias.

- **Enhanced communication and transparency**, ensuring that staff on leave, working overseas, and those requiring alternative formats receive accessible information.
- **Mandatory ED&I and unconscious bias training** for all staff involved in SRR, RI and output decisions, supported by tailored REF specific workshops.
- **Embedded monitoring**, with EqlAs conducted at *key stages of SRR, RI and output selection to identify and address any emerging disparities.

*EqlA will be carried out by an independent panel including the *Director of Student & Academic Services* and an HR Partner (i.e. the Equality impact assessment Panel) following the mock REF submission (2027). The results will be used to inform any required revision to the Code of Practice process by the Working Group (if permitted by SFC). A further EqlA will be carried out by the independent panel, prior to the final REF submission of SRR and outputs, taking account of the provisional impact on individuals by protected characteristic. As a small institution, we will take particular care during EqlA analysis involving small numbers of individuals as these can heavily influence the percentages reported in statistical data.

The EqlA has therefore ensured that the policies and procedures set out in this CoP are fair, inclusive, transparent, and aligned with the University's statutory obligations and commitments to equality, diversity and responsible research assessment.

Findings from future EqlAs will continue to inform refinement of processes throughout the REF2029 preparation period.

Part 3: Determining Research Independence

(Required for all participating institutions)

Two tests determine an eligible contract that is qualified for inclusion in the volume measure:

- Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR): for 'teaching and research' contracts (see Part 2).
- Research Independence (RI): for 'research only' contracts (see Part 3).

Contracts meeting either of these tests are marked with the REFQUALCON flag in the HESA Staff record, signifying inclusion in the volume measure.

Staff members holding multiple eligible contracts at Abertay will have their CONFTE calculated across all these contracts.

1. Policies and Procedures:

- **Criteria and Evidence:** *Clearly outline criteria and evidence used to assess research independence, particularly for 'research only' (ACEMPFUN 2) contracts.*

(a) At Abertay, **Research Independent (RI) contracts** are those that fulfil all the following criteria:

- Staff with eligible contracts whose primary employment function is to undertake 'research only' (ACEMPFUN 2) activities, as recorded in the HESA Staff record ACEMPFUN field.
- The staff member is on the Abertay payroll within the REF period (i.e. academic years 2025-26, 2026-27 for the relevant HESA Staff record collections).
- The 'research only' contract demonstrates RI i.e. the staff member undertakes self-directed research, rather than primarily carrying out another individual's research programme (see Part 3.1(b) below). RI classification is treated as persistent for an individual contract.

Abertay do not employ hourly/daily paid contracted staff that would meet the eligibility criteria for research independence at the University.

The contracts of fixed-term 'research only' staff who meet the general eligibility criteria, are eligible for inclusion.

The contracts of pensioned staff (i.e. in receipt of a UK HEI pension) who continue in salaried employment with a research contract and meet the general eligibility criteria, are eligible for inclusion.

Staff employed wholly overseas: the contracts of these staff, including those at overseas campuses not on the Abertay payroll, are not eligible for inclusion.

For staff working in part-time UK employment and partly overseas, the record will reflect only the UK resident employment time.

Exception for normal UK-based employment: if time abroad is part of normal UK-based employment, the CONFTE will not be reduced.

The contracts of staff employed by a UK HEI but based overseas will not be included unless their activity is clearly and directly connected to a UK-based department/unit.

- **Decision-Making and Communication:** *Describe the process, roles, and timelines.*
- (b) All **eligible staff on 'research only' contracts** that engage actively in **independent research (RI)** are those where staff members are:
 - engaging with externally funded research as the lead applicant³,
 - hold an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship requiring research independence (<https://2029.ref.ac.uk/publication/research-fellowships/>),
 - lead a research group or a substantial/specialised work package,
 - for UoAs 32 this may also include being named as a co-applicant on an externally funded research grant/award and having significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research,

and that it is an expectation of their job role (i.e. stated within their job description/ contract). Each indicator may not necessarily individually demonstrate independence and where appropriate multiple factors may need to be considered.

The Faculty Executive working with *Heads of Department/* line managers identify those 'research only' contracts that are RI based on the criteria above. Decisions are discussed and confirmed by the *Head of Department/* line manager with individual 'research only' staff. Any inaccuracies in the RI data being returned to the HESA Staff record may be raised at this point, or during the appeals process (Part 2(4))⁴.

Research priorities and activities are discussed and agreed with individual research staff during bi-annual *Development Discussion* and/or related meetings with *Heads of Department/* line managers. Feedback on progress and the previous years achievements are also reviewed and discussed. Identification of 'research only' contract staff as RI is reviewed and approved by the *REF Decisions on Staff and Outputs Group* (confirmed normally by July of each academic year).

Abertay adopt the same approach for all UoAs across the University (with the exception of the additional UoA32 RI indicator identified above).

Governance and assurance arrangements for workload and funding allocations are implemented through existing Abertay governance structures and processes, specifically the *University Senior Leadership Team*, the *REF Decisions on Staff and Outputs Group*, the *Research Executive*, *Operational Planning processes*, the *Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee* (a committee of the University Senate) and associated quarterly and annual reporting processes. Abertay staff should note that allocation as RI does not constitute assessment of individual performance.

³This will involve supporting a substantive programme of work, enabling the employment of another staff member, and/or undertaking responsibilities equivalent to the established funding schemes that qualify an individual for Research Independence.

⁴From 2026-27, RI contracts will be identified for HESA purposes as part of the Abertay Recruitment process.

2. Staff, Committees, and Training:

Please refer to section Part 2(3) above.

3. Appeals:

- *Clearly outline how staff can appeal decisions about research independence, with appropriate links and contact details.*

Any inaccuracies in the RI data being returned to the HESA Staff record may be raised during discussions with *Heads of Department/* line managers or during the appeals process. Please also refer to section Part 2(4) above.

4. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA):

- **EIA Integration:** *Demonstrate how EIA informed research independence determination and policy/procedure development. Provide information on data, findings, and actions taken.*

An EqlA directly informed the development of the University's approach to determining Research Independence (RI). The EqlA considered a range of evidence, including, workforce data, previous institutional EqlAs (Athena SWAN, Race Equality Charter), our REF2021 submission and outcomes, workload allocation records, feedback gathered through consultation, and our Abertay research environment and culture. For example, our policies, practices, investment and facilities to support and develop research excellence and impact are available to all academic and research staff, and provide opportunities to advance equality of opportunities and/or eliminate discrimination. This ensured that policy and procedures were aligned with the University's statutory duties and commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion.

The assessment identified potential differential impacts for groups including women, minority ethnic staff, disabled staff, part time workers, and those returning from leave. In response, the RI criteria and processes were refined (within the bounds of the REF Guidance (<https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/>)) to ensure fairness, including:

- **Clear and transparent RI indicators**, applied consistently across the institution;
- **Pro rated and contextualised assessment** for part time staff and those with career breaks or periods of leave;
- **Strengthened cross institutional review** of decisions to mitigate bias;
- **Enhanced communication and accessibility** for staff on leave or working overseas;
- **Mandatory EDI and unconscious bias training** for all individuals involved in RI decisions; and
- **Scheduled EqlAs at *key decision points** (SRR, RI and output selection) to monitor ongoing impact.

*EqlA will be carried out by an independent panel including the *Director of Student & Academic Services* and an HR Partner (i.e. the Equality impact assessment Panel) following the mock REF submission (2027). The results will be used to inform any required revision to the Code of

Practice process by the Working Group (if permitted by SFC). A further EqIA will be carried out by the independent panel, prior to the final REF submission of SRR and outputs, taking account of the provisional impact on individuals by protected characteristic. As a small institution, we will take particular care during EqIA analysis involving small numbers of individuals as these can heavily influence the percentages reported in statistical data.

Through this process, the University ensured that the determination of Research Independence is fair, inclusive, transparent and compliant with the Equality Act 2010.

Findings from future EqIAs will guide further refinement as preparation for REF2029 progresses.

Part 4: Allocating Contracts to UoAs

(Required for all participating institutions)

1. Policies and Procedures:

- **Criteria and Evidence:** *Clearly outline criteria and evidence used to allocate contracts to UoAs*

Abertay is a small, collaborative, modern University with an established reputation for working well across traditional research boundaries, as well as within new and emerging disciplines and sectors (see *Abertay Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Strategy 2025-30*). Abertay Faculty and Departmental structures are largely designed to support the efficient development and delivery of our teaching portfolio, and so our researchers routinely engage in collaborative, pan- and inter-disciplinary research across and between our Faculty Departments. Consequently, Departmental and HESA cost centre attribution are not always a reliable indication of appropriate REF UoA mapping for staff contracts at Abertay.

For contracts where Departmental and/or HESA cost centre attribution are not a reliable indication of an appropriate REF UoA mapping, Abertay (the *Abertay REF Team* in collaboration with the *Faculty Vice-Principals*) considers the general research and/or discipline domain in which the eligible contract holder is working and aligns this with one of the relevant UoAs the University is submitting to (i.e. determines the submitting UoA for which there is a clear and appropriate association). Decisions around the allocation of contracts to UoAs are based solely on each individual's relevant disciplinary expertise and/or activity, and its alignment with a UoA. In some cases, where an individual's work could reasonably align with more than one UoA due to the nature of their work, the overall available maximum FTE carrying capacity of each Abertay UoA submission (based on the number of available Impact Case Studies for that UoA) may be a secondary factor for consideration. UoA allocation for individual contracts may change between annual HESA returns, reflecting the evolving nature of research and substantive connections. Furthermore, staff with multiple contracts, may have those contracts returned to different UoAs.

- **Decision-Making and Communication:** *Describe the process, roles, and timelines.*

Following the process above, individual contract-UoA allocations are made by the relevant *Faculty Vice-Principals* with input from the *Abertay REF Team*, *Head of Department/ line-manager* and *UoA Champion Leads*, where appropriate. Final oversight and approval of allocations are by the *REF Decisions on Staff and Outputs Group (REF Decisions on Staff and Outputs Group)* (final UoA allocations confirmed by end of July each academic year) to ensure parity of approach across all Departments and UoAs as well as fair and equitable allocation. Decisions are communicated to individual Abertay staff by *Heads of Department/ Faculty Vice-Principals*.

Allocation is identified using the REFUOA2029 field in the HESA Staff record.

2. Staff, Committees, and Training:

Please refer to section Part 2(3) above.

3. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA):

- **EIA Integration:** *Demonstrate how EIA informed allocation of contracts to UoAs and policy/procedure development. Provide information on data, findings, and actions taken.*

The University is committed to ensuring that the allocation of academic and research only contracts to UoAs is conducted in a fair, transparent, and equitable manner. Decisions around the allocation of contracts to UoAs will be based solely on each individual's relevant disciplinary expertise and/or activity, and its substantive alignment with a UoA. In some cases, where an individual's work could reasonably align with more than one UoA due to the nature of the work, the overall available maximum FTE carrying capacity of each Abertay UoA submission (based on the number of available Impact Case Studies for that UoA) may be a secondary factor for consideration.. In all cases, we, will actively avoid any form of discrimination.

No specific equality data is currently available for this process. EqlA to date, has therefore been based on consideration of potential impacts on protected groups, existing sector evidence, feedback gathered through consultation, and professional judgement. The EqlA has directly informed the development of the University's approach to the allocation of contracts to UoAs (within the bounds of the REF Guidance (<https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/>), thus ensuring that our policy and procedures are aligned with the University's statutory duties and commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion. Equality related process developments include:

- Allocation decisions will be based on relevant research expertise/activity and, substantive disciplinary alignment, and not on protected characteristics or assumptions about availability, career stage or contract status.
- Mandatory EDI and unconscious bias training for all individuals involved in contract allocation decisions will help ensure that no protected characteristic (as defined in the Equality Act 2010) influences the allocation of contracts to UoAs.
- Staff on part-time, fixed-term, fractional, atypical or multiple contracts will be considered equitably, including where different contracts have different substantive disciplinary connections.
- Particular care will be taken where staff have been absent because of maternity, adoption, parental, neonatal care, disability-related, long-term sickness or other relevant leave, so that absence from the workplace does not lead to disadvantage in allocation or communication.
- Communication will be accessible and will take account of staff who are absent due to maternity, parental, adoption, neonatal care and/or long-term sickness leave to ensure they are not disadvantaged.
- All staff involved in research regardless of discipline, including those on part time, fixed term, or atypical contracts, have equitable opportunity to access contract related policies, practices, University facilities, investment and training, thereby supporting development of research excellence and impact.

- Strengthened cross institutional review of decisions to mitigate bias, to ensure that that no protected characteristic (as defined in the Equality Act 2010) influences the allocation of contracts to UoAs.
- Scheduled data informed EqlAs at key decision points* to monitor ongoing impact and to test whether the allocation process remains fair, transparent and consistently applied across UoAs.

No adverse impacts have been identified at this stage. However, due to the absence of equality-specific data at the point of CoP development, there remains a risk that differential impacts may emerge during implementation.

The University will therefore embed EqlA throughout the process for allocating academic and research-only contracts to REF UoAs. The purpose of the EqlA is to test whether the criteria, evidence base, decision-making roles and communication arrangements operate fairly in practice, and to identify and mitigate any risk that staff with protected characteristics, or staff in particular contract or career circumstances, are disadvantaged by the allocation process.

The EqlA will inform both the development of the policy/procedure and the review of allocation outcomes. In particular, it will consider whether the stated principles and criteria are consistently applied, whether any groups appear disproportionately concentrated in particular UoAs or affected by changes in allocation, and whether the communication and review routes are accessible to all relevant staff. It is worth noting that as a small institution submitting to a limited number of UoAs, we recognise that equality data may be skewed in some UoAs due to the composition of staffing groups within those disciplines.

The EqlA will draw on relevant quantitative and qualitative information, including allocation patterns by UoA, contract type, full-time/part-time status, career stage and, where available and appropriate, protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. It will also take account of issues raised through staff communications, confidential queries, review requests, complaints, and discussions with relevant managers. Analysis will be proportionate and will protect confidentiality, particularly where small numbers mean that individuals could be identifiable.

*An initial data based EqlA will be undertaken by an independent panel, including the *Director of Student & Academic Services* and an HR Partner, following the mock REF submission in 2027. This review will assess whether the allocation approach, evidence used and decision-making arrangements have produced any identifiable or potential adverse impact, and will recommend mitigations where required. A further EqlA will be completed before the final REF submission of staff, environment and outputs, taking account of the provisional impact on individuals by protected characteristic and other relevant equality-related factors.

Where the EqlA identifies potential disparity or unintended bias, the relevant decision-making group will record the finding, agree appropriate action, and review the impact of that action at the next allocation checkpoint. Possible actions may include clarifying allocation criteria, strengthening guidance for decision-makers, revisiting individual or grouped allocation decisions, improving communication routes, or providing additional training for those involved in allocation decisions.

Through this process, the University will ensure that the allocation of contracts to UoAs is fair, inclusive, transparent, evidence-informed and compliant with the Equality Act 2010. Findings from each EqlA will be used to refine the process as preparation for REF2029 progresses.

Part 5: Selecting outputs

1. Policies and Procedures:

o Identifying substantive link to outputs

The **eligibility of outputs** will be based on the existence of a **substantive link** between Abertay and the research it has enabled in the form of an output that is first made publicly available during the **output eligibility period**. The **substantive link** is evidenced through an **eligible employment relationship** with the author (or equivalent) who has made a significant research contribution to the output (see STAGES below for details). The **HESA ID** of staff with a substantive link will be identified for each submitted output.

Output will be the product of research, briefly defined as a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared (see Part 2(2)). Outputs will also comply with Open Access requirements as stated within the *Abertay Research Publications Policy* (see Part 6(2)).

Abertay employs fair and transparent policies and multi-stage procedures for identifying substantive links to outputs:

STAGE 1: The *Abertay REF Team* will identify ALL outputs authored by an Abertay staff member that fall within the **output eligibility period** definition, this being:

- Outputs must be first made publicly available between **1 January 2021 and 31 December 2028**, or, if a confidential report, lodged with the body to whom it is confidential during this same period.
- Where the final form of an output was delayed due to COVID-19 beyond 31 December 2020 and was subsequently published by 31 March 2021 and submitted to REF2021, that output is not eligible for resubmission to REF2029.
- Where the date of imprint on a publication lies outside the publication period but the actual date of appearance is within the publication period, evidence of the actual date on which it became publicly available will be stated (e.g. a letter from the publisher) for data verification purposes).

STAGE 2: The *Abertay REF Team* will identify ALL such outputs (i.e. REF output eligibility period compliant) that also comply with substantive link **eligible employment relationship** requirements, through verification with our *People Services* system (iTrent). **Eligible employment relationships** are those where:

- a member of staff has been/is employed by Abertay for a minimum of 0.2 FTE for at least 12 months continuous employment (as defined by Section 210 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA 1996)) (continuous employment may be demonstrated by a sequence of consecutive contracts), AND
- the role descriptor includes an explicit expectation of research activity (in line with the [REF definition of research](#)) within the role ('research activity' is not restricted by profession and an eligible employment relationship may be with any staff member who undertakes, enables or supports research), AND

- an eligible employment relationship must have occurred, either:
 - at the point at which the submitted output was first made publicly available within the REF publication period, OR
 - before (for a time-limited period) the submitted output was first made publicly available within the REF publication period, when the research resulting in the output was carried out. The time-limited period prior to the date of the output first being made publicly available, during which research resulting in the output was carried out is:
 - two years for the majority of outputs
 - five years for [long-form and extended process outputs](#)

Eligible employment relationships that occur after the point at which an output was first made publicly available do not constitute a substantive link (see below for exception for long-form and/or extended process outputs).

Outputs sole-authored by, or where the only substantive link to Abertay is through the following groups, will not be eligible for submission:

- postgraduate research students (including PhD theses)
- visiting or honorary staff
- staff on teaching only contracts (that is, those returned to the HESA Staff record as ACEMPFUN.01)
- individuals employed on academic or other contracts with no explicit expectation of research within the job role, technical teaching or support only contract.
- In exceptional, clearly justified and pre-cleared cases (upon prior request and approval from the REF Director), outputs sole-authored by staff on teaching-only, honorary emeritus contracts, or other non-research contracts may be submitted, where the institution has provided allocated time and funding to support that specific research activity and that this can be evidenced. In such cases, the relevant staff on teaching-only, honorary emeritus contracts, or other non-research contracts, should highlight the potential output to the *REF Decisions on Staff and Outputs Group* for review and further action.
- Where a researcher is employed on a contract that constitutes an eligible employment relationship at Abertay at the point a REF submission is made, **long-form⁵ and/or extended process outputs⁶** published before this contract commenced⁷ will be eligible for submission if:
 - they were first made publicly available during the REF period (January 2021 to December 2028), AND
 - the staff member's eligible employment relationship with the submitting institution commenced within 5 years of the output first being made publicly available.

Outputs submitted using this exception will be flagged. Where this exception is requested, a 100-word justification of long-form/extended process designation will be submitted by Abertay for assessment by panels (outputs not considered to be long-form/extended process will receive an unclassified score).

⁵Long-form outputs are defined as outputs of extended scale or scope. Extended process outputs are the culmination of a substantial, discrete research endeavour which, due to the nature of the approach or methodology, involved intense activity, sustained over a period of time, usually of five years or longer.

⁶A reserve item will be submitted where the long-form and/or extended process output submitted is subject to a request for double-weighting.

⁷The researcher does not need to have had an eligible employment relationship with another institution at the point the output was first made publicly available.

STAGE 3: The *Abertay REF Team* will identify ALL eligible outputs to the *REF UoA Champion Leads* and their teams for review as ‘potential for submission pool’ (STAGE 1-2). The allocation of outputs as ‘potential for submission pool’ to individual UoAs involves a process of careful consideration of the output’s subject matter and alignment with the disciplinary area defined by UoA descriptors (TBC by REF Main Panels). The process includes consideration of diverse output types, as well as interdisciplinary, pan-disciplinary and multidisciplinary outputs with the potential for submission to multiple UoAs. Furthermore, staff, line managers and *UoA Champion Leads* also have the opportunity to identify any potentially ‘missing’ outputs at any stage via email to REF@abertay.ac.uk for further compliance investigation.

STAGE 4: Assessing the quality of outputs to aid the **selection of outputs** from the ‘potential for submission pool’ (also, see sections *Assigning outputs to UoA/s*; *Procedures for supporting diversity of outputs*; *Procedures for ensuring submissions are representative of the research undertaken within the submitting unit during the REF period*; and *Policies and procedures and responsible research assessment practice*, below). This is a multi-step process:

- (a) Abertay authors are required to self-assess their own outputs within the scope of the UoA(s) descriptor(s) identified by the *Abertay REF Team* as ‘potential for submission’ (step omitted if the authors are unavailable as former staff etc). Authors are required to give careful consideration to the output’s subject matter and alignment with UoA descriptors as well as an assessment of output quality (originality, significance and rigour). The author review provides a check against the independent *UoA Champion Lead* scoring (b below) and establishes a baseline for authors’ ongoing learning and development towards research excellence. Abertay authors are also required to highlight any potential diverse output types and/or ‘delayed outputs’ for the attention of the *UoA Champion Lead* and the *Abertay REF Team*. In cases of multi-author outputs, Abertay authors may be required to demonstrate that a significant research contribution (SRC) was made by the author with an eligible employment relationship to Abertay (TBC once clarified by REF Main Panels and UoA Sub-Panels).
- (b) The *Abertay REF UoA Champion Leads* and their groups conduct an independent assessment of the outputs identified by the *Abertay REF Team* as ‘potential for submission’, within the scope of the UoA which they are leading. This involves careful consideration of the output’s subject matter and alignment with UoA descriptors as well as an assessment of output quality (originality, significance and rigour). *UoA Champion*

Leads also identify any outputs as 'potential for double weighting' and assess these, and potentially 'delayed outputs', accordingly.

- (c) Our *REF External Advisors for UoAs* conduct an additional independent assessment of a sample of potential REF outputs identified by the *UoA Champion Leads*. The purpose of this external review is to help Abertay calibrate our internal assessments against a potential approach of the REF sub-panels. This helps to inform any moderation required to our *UoA Champion Lead* scores.

Any outputs in British Sign Language or recognised languages (e.g. Scottish Gaelic, Scots, Ulster Scots, Welsh, Irish, and Irish Sign Language) will be treated in accordance with their legal status relating to protection and promotion and will not be treated less favourably in output selection.

Anonymous, indicative feedback from the Abertay *REF UoA Champion* groups and *REF External Advisors* will be collated and shared, via *Heads of Department / Faculty Vice-Principals* (with input from the *Research Executive*), with relevant researchers/authors. This process is intended solely to support the development of research and researchers. It does not constitute an evaluation of individual performance *per se*, nor does it directly determine the selection of outputs for submission. In line with REF2029 guidance, outputs are considered independently of individual staff members in submission decisions, and feedback processes are designed to avoid the attribution of quality judgements to individuals.

With input from the *UoA Champion Leads*, the *Abertay REF Team* collate and coordinate a moderated set of Abertay assessment scores for review by the *REF Decisions on Staff and Outputs Group*. This group reviews scores and feedback and approves the list of Abertay output scores for UoAs. A verification log documents decisions, evidence, and any amendments.

- **Selecting outputs where the substantive link is via former staff:** *covering compulsory redundancy, voluntary redundancy or severance, retirement, expiration of fixed term contracts*

Where the substantive link to an output (following STAGE 1 (above) REF eligible period compliance) exists via a former staff member (irrespective of when the output was published in relation to the eligible employment relationship), Abertay will employ fair and transparent policies and procedures for selecting outputs (via STAGE 4) authored by:

- Former staff who resigned from Abertay employment. Outputs sole-authored by, or where the only substantive link to Abertay, where the substantive link occurred before the submitted output was made publicly available, and where the author resigned from Abertay employment, will be considered as eligible if STAGE 2-3 compliant.
- Staff who have retired. Outputs sole-authored by, or where the **only** substantive link to Abertay, where the substantive link occurred before the submitted output was made publicly available, and where the author retired, will be considered as eligible if STAGE 2-3 compliant.
- Staff leaving after the expiry of a fixed-term contract. Outputs sole-authored by, or where the **only** substantive link to Abertay, where the substantive link occurred before the

submitted output was made publicly available, and where the author left Abertay after expiry of a fixed term contract, will be considered as eligible if STAGE 2-3 compliant

- Any staff who have taken voluntary redundancy or severance. Outputs sole-authored by, or where the **only** substantive link to Abertay, where the substantive link occurred before the submitted output was made publicly available, and where the author was subject to voluntary redundancy or severance, will be considered as eligible if STAGE 2-3 compliant.
- Any staff who have been made compulsorily redundant. Outputs sole-authored by, or where the **only** substantive link to Abertay, where the substantive link occurred before the submitted output was made publicly available, and where the author was subject to compulsory redundancy, are not eligible for submission

- **Assigning outputs to UoA/s:** *Considering interdisciplinary research and submitting an output to multiple UoAs.*

Abertay is a small, collaborative, modern University with an established reputation for working well across traditional research boundaries, as well as within new and emerging disciplines and sectors (see *Abertay Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Strategy 2025-30*). Abertay Faculty and Departmental structures are largely designed to support the efficient development and delivery of our teaching portfolio, and so our researchers routinely engage in collaborative, pan- and inter-disciplinary research across and between our Faculty Departments as well as with external collaborators. Consequently, Department and HESA cost centre attribution are not always a reliable indication of appropriate REF UoA mapping for staff outputs.

Abertay employs fair, robust and transparent multi-stage processes for selecting and assigning an output to a UoA or UoAs:

STAGE 5: The **number of outputs required in a UoA submission** is determined by multiplying the volume measure (Parts 2 & 3) by 2.5 at UoA level. The result is then rounded to the nearest whole number, with .5 results rounded up. The appropriate number of outputs for a UoA are selected using the following process:

In collaboration with the *REF Champion Leads*, the *Abertay REF Team* **assign outputs to UoAs** based on:

- merit (i.e. based on the highest ranked Abertay assessment scores of outputs for individual UoAs, derived in STAGE 4),
- whilst also endeavouring to represent the range of research activity in a submitting UoA over the assessment period and the UoAs research strategies (described in the UoA level SPRE),
- and also satisfying the *Procedures for supporting diversity of outputs*, *Procedures for ensuring submissions are representative of the research undertaken within the submitting unit during the REF period*, and the *Policies and procedures and responsible research assessment practice* sections below.

Appropriate assignment of outputs will also ensure:

- meaningful alignment with the UoA descriptors (TBC once clarified by the REF Main Panels and UoA Sub-Panels)
- an output is not submitted more than once within the same UoA
- we do not submit two or more research outputs to a UoA which include significant material in common (for example, a journal article that also appears as a chapter in a book)
- an output may be submitted to more than one UoA if aligned with the UoA descriptors (supporting recognition of inter- and multi-disciplinary research)
- we avoid submission of an output to more than two UoAs
- no more than 5 outputs are associated with a single substantive link within a submission at UoA level
- double-weighted output requests (for outputs of extended scale and scope - count as two outputs) are flagged (see reserve outputs below)
- an output expected to be made publicly available between the submission date and the end of the REF publication period but is pending publication at the point of submission will be flagged (see reserve outputs below)
- reserve outputs will be identified and submitted for each delayed publication submitted and for double-weighted outputs. Reserve outputs will not be associated with a specific output but will be listed in order of merit (based on Abertay assessment scores)
- in cases where the output is a confidential report (include any item produced for and lodged, in the publication period, with a company, government body or other research sponsor(s), but which has not been published because of its commercial or other sensitivity), that prior permission is granted from the sponsoring organisation that the output may be made available for assessment. Abertay will confirm permission has been secured if/when we make the submission and this will be flagged
- where a long-form and/or extended process output exception is requested (see STAGE 2) this is flagged and a 100-word justification provided.

Output selection for each UoA submission is a manual process requiring fair and careful expert judgement to balance the strongest CKU aligned to UoA disciplinary fit, with representation of the UoA's research, including diverse output types appropriate to their disciplinary context, and REF rule compliance.

For each output submitted, the *Abertay REF Team* will identify: the output number; output type; date of output; title of output; HESA Staff Identifier (identifying the eligible employment relationship between an individual author (or equivalent) and Abertay); DOI if available; former staff flag; pre-publication substantive link; open access compliance id; request for cross-referral; research group (the research group to which the research output is assigned, if applicable - not a mandatory field); research specialism (where requested in the Panel criteria to be provided to assist in allocating outputs to appropriate readers); co-authors (in the cases of co-authored or multi-authored outputs, the number of additional co-authors); disciplinary identifier flags (these flags will be determined by sub-panels TBC); a brief abstract (for outputs in languages other than English); pending publication flag (and an output on the reserve list); 'double-weight'

request (and an output on the reserve list); supplementary information (published alongside an output TBC); confidential output flag; long-form and/or extended process exception request flag (and a 100-word justification provided); and panel additional data requirements (TBC).

Proposed UoA submissions will be considered and approved by the *REF Steering Group* prior to recommendation to the *University Principal & Vice-Chancellor* for final approval prior to submission to the REF System.

○ Procedures for supporting diversity of outputs

Research involves a diverse set of research practices, which lead to a wide range of diverse outputs, expressed in the most appropriate way for the research itself and its audiences and partners. Such outputs may include innovative formats, accessible reporting formats, and modes of expression that may depart from historical conventions within specific fields and contexts. Abertay encourages and supports researchers to produce diverse output types suited to their disciplinary context and intended audience, with this embedded in the normal research process and supported through Graduate School development training. Examples of diverse output types include, but go well beyond, journal articles, conference papers, monographs and book chapters, to include, as appropriate to each UoA:

- non-textual (artefacts, audio, visual, multi-modal)
- creative, performance and practice-led outputs
- reviews and research synthesis
- software and code
- datasets
- translations and critical editions
- reagents
- multi-component outputs
- policy summaries and analyses
- different types of reports
- outputs produced in languages other than English
- reviews, textbooks or edited works (including editions of texts and translations) may be included if they embody research as defined in [REF definition of research](#).

A glossary of output categories and collection formats will be published by REF2029. Further guidance on types of outputs will be published at a later date in an update to *REF2021 Guidance on Submissions Annex K*, which offers a good indication of the potential range of outputs.

Abertay are a signatory of *San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)* – see section - *Policies and procedures and responsible research assessment practice* (below).

Abertay take a holistic, balanced and fair approach to output selection and building a submission based on UoA disciplinary fit, quality of research output, representing the research of the UoA, REF rule compliance, as well as supporting diverse output types befitting their disciplinary context. Authors are encouraged to identify diverse output types as part of STAGE 4(a) and through subsequent discussions held with *Heads of Department* and *UoA Champion Leads*. With input from the *UoA Champion Leads*, the *Abertay REF Team* coordinate the selection of outputs for each UoA for review and final approval by the *REF Steering Group*.

- **Procedures for ensuring submissions are representative of the research undertaken within the submitting unit during the REF period:** *Outlining the processes that will be undertaken to ensure that 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.*

Abertay is undergoing an ambitious programme of continuous improvement, including realignment and restructuring since REF2021. This has included a change from three Schools to two Faculties, with realignment of Departmental structures composed of multiple subjects/disciplines. The external funding environment has also required urgent adaptation and response from the Abertay community, with effective management of staff priorities and workload allocations to balance delivery of our academic and national obligations and focus (e.g. teaching, RKE&I, external engagement and impact). Further detail will be set out within *the Institutional Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE)* statement.

The *UoA SPRE* statements will be developed by the relevant REF *UoA Champion Lead* together with the *Faculty Vice-Principals*, the *Heads of Department*, the *Research Executive*, and with input from the research community of the unit. Each *UoA SPRE* will provide an overview of research activity and the academic framing of the submitting unit, including any discrete subject structures, research groups and/or areas of specialised academic endeavour. To mitigate the potential for full decoupling leading to the under-representation of research areas, research practices and research groups, the *UoA SPRE* statement will outline the research subject range and diversity of research activities undertaken during the REF2029 cycle. The *Statement of Representation (SoR)* will indicate how the unit's submitted research represents the research activity, topics, methods and practices of the unit, however broad or specialised the unit may be, as well as a justification for how submitted outputs and associated reserve lists represent the subject range and diversity of research activities undertaken by the unit during the REF2029 cycle.

Abertay employs fair, robust and transparent multi-stage procedures (described throughout the CoP) for ensuring submissions are representative of the research undertaken within the submitting UoA during the REF period.

During STAGE 5, Abertay takes a holistic, balanced and fair approach to output selection and building a submission based on UoA disciplinary fit, quality of research output, representing the research of the UoA, REF rule compliance, as well as supporting diverse output types befitting their disciplinary context. Additional checks are carried out at STAGE 6 to ensure submissions are representative of the research undertaken within the submitting unit during the REF period:

STAGE 6: With input from the *UoA Champion Leads*, the *Abertay REF Team* coordinates the selection of outputs to build the output portfolio for a proposed UoA submission (STAGE 5). This is checked against the *UoA SPRE* stated research strategies and structures over the REF period (including contributions to large-scale research programs, networks, or national/global initiatives), the diversity of research outputs produced by the UoA and identified as eligible outputs with ‘potential for submission pool’ (STAGE 2), and the contributions from multidisciplinary collaborations and institutional partnerships, supporting sustainable contributions to knowledge and understanding. The University is committed to achieving an appropriate balance between broad representativeness and meeting REF expectations for submitting the highest-quality research within each unit. We will endeavour to ensure a fair and balanced representation of the unit’s research activity; however, we recognise that this is inherently challenging in smaller UoAs, where a limited number of eligible outputs can lead to disproportionate influence by a small subset of contributors. Small samples are more vulnerable to statistical skew, meaning that the profile of the UoA may be less stable and more sensitive to individual variations in output volume or quality. To mitigate this, we will apply a transparent and evidence-based approach to selecting outputs that best reflect the breadth and strength of the unit’s research. EqIA is embedded as an ongoing process, with analysis planned over the REF period to monitor participation and representation. Abertay staff should note that output selection does not constitute assessment of individual performance.

Should any proportionate adjustments be required to the output profile for submission, this will be done prior to review and approval by the *REF Steering Group*.

○ Policies and procedures and responsible research assessment practice

Abertay is a signatory of the *San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment* (DORA). We are committed to responsible research assessment practices for all recruitment, progression and relevant business processes, as well as for REF. Through our REF CoP, we implement a fair, transparent approach to evaluating ALL research conducted at the University. We adopt responsible research assessment practices in the selection of outputs for submission that prioritises intrinsic quality, merit, and diverse contributions to research. Our assessment of outputs recognises rigorous, significant and original research across multiple purposes, designs, methodologies, analytical approaches and modes of communication. We communicate this internally via our intranet *MyAbertay*, our research networking tool *ARC VivaEngage*, and through training for our *Faculty Vice-Principals*, *Heads of Department* and *UoA Champion Leads* and their teams. Our REF CoP and all those involved in REF preparations are required to:

- assess the quality of the research itself through peer review, rather than relying solely on where it was published
- value a wide range of outputs beyond traditional journal articles
- make judgements based on REF Panel and UoA Sub-Panel guidance (TBC);
- only utilise quantitative indicators like citation counts responsibly, ensuring they are context-sensitive, transparent, and only used alongside qualitative judgments of the research itself and in line with REF panel guidance on use citation data.

2. Staff, Committees, and Training:

Please refer to section Part 2(3) above.

3. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA):

- *EIA Integration: Demonstrate how EIA informed the selection of outputs and policy/procedure development. Provide information on data, findings, and actions taken.*

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken to inform the development of the policy and processes for selecting research outputs. The EqIA reviewed the proposed criteria, decision making steps, and governance arrangements to identify any potential for differential impact on individuals with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, including for any outputs published in British Sign Language or recognised languages (e.g. Scottish Gaelic, Scots, Ulster Scots, Welsh, Irish, and Irish Sign Language) which will be treated in accordance with their legal status relating to protection and promotion and will not be treated less favourably in output selection. This assessment has helped ensure that the selection processes are fair, transparent, and inclusive.

Findings from the EqIA informed several refinements to the policy (within the bounds of the REF Guidance (<https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/>)), including clearer articulation of quality based criteria, improved transparency around timelines and expectations, and the incorporation of safeguards such as structured moderation and the separation of output selection from performance management.

The EqIA will continue to be reviewed as part of ongoing monitoring. Any emerging disparities or unintended impacts identified through periodic analysis will be addressed through updates to the policy or its implementation processes to maintain equitable practice.

Part 6: Appendices

1. Equality Impact Assessment

See <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/about/the-university/governance-and-management/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/equality-impact-assessments/>

2. Referenced material in the CoP

University Equality & Diversity Policy <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/about/the-university/governance-and-management/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/>

University Bullying and Harassment Guidelines <https://intranet.abertay.ac.uk/staff/people-services/health-and-wellbeing/#41944>

University People Strategy <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/about/the-university/abertay-university-strategy-2025-30/supporting-strategies/people-strategy/>

Research Culture and Environment Policy (to be approved)

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers Action Plan and Report <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/research-overview/research-governance/>

Workload Allocation Model <https://intranet.abertay.ac.uk/search/?query=workload+allocation+model+>

Development Discussions <https://intranet.abertay.ac.uk/staff/people-services/development-discussions/#54265>

Code of Practice Working Group <https://intranet.abertay.ac.uk/research/ref-2029/#62807>

Head of Department <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/about/the-university/governance-and-management/management-and-structure/senior-management-and-organisational-structure-diagram/>

Senior Leadership Team <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/about/the-university/governance-and-management/management-and-structure/senior-management-and-organisational-structure-diagram/>

Principal and Vice-Chancellor <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/about/the-university/governance-and-management/management-and-structure/senior-management-and-organisational-structure-diagram/>

Unit of Assessment Champion Leads <https://intranet.abertay.ac.uk/research/ref-2029/#62807>

Abertay REF Team <https://intranet.abertay.ac.uk/research/ref-2029/#62807>

REF Decisions on Staff and Outputs Group <https://intranet.abertay.ac.uk/research/ref-2029/#62807>

REF Steering Group <https://intranet.abertay.ac.uk/research/ref-2029/#62807>

Appeals Panel <https://intranet.abertay.ac.uk/research/ref-2029/#62807>

REF External Advisors <https://intranet.abertay.ac.uk/research/ref-2029/#62807>

Abertay Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation Strategy (2025-30) <https://www.abertay.ac.uk/about/the-university/abertay-university-strategy-2025-30/supporting-strategies/>

Abertay Research Publications Policy <https://intranet.abertay.ac.uk/research/open-access/>