

Equality Impact Assessment

APPENDIX 1: The EIA Form

EIA Form

Name of Mechanism: REF-eligible output scoring process

1. Area overseeing EIA

Research, Innovation and Enterprise [REF Strategy Group]

2. Lead Officer

REF Manager

3. Date EIA started

20 Aug 2025

4. Is this a new or existing mechanism?

New (adaptation / enhancement of existing processes)

5. Does the mechanism impact on people?

Yes

6. What are the aims, objectives and purpose of the mechanism?

To fairly and transparently undertake the administrative process of assessing, rating and ranking the pool of REF-eligible outputs, enabling us to measure research quality.

7. Are there any associated objectives?

- a. To ensure we capture the full potential pool of outputs that can be considered for a future REF submission
- b. To ensure we capture all output types and areas of research in adherence to REF criteria guidance
- c. To use the assessment findings to inform quality enhancement and improvement of output quality in future output generation

8. Who is intended to benefit from the mechanism and in what way?

- a. REF team – By allowing us to manage output quality and prepare for a future REF submission
- b. Research generating staff – By allowing them to have their outputs rated and considered for submission to a future REF
- c. University – By enabling research output quality / performance monitoring.

9. Is any data available about the mechanism?

The previous scoring process (a volume-limited version, conducted in 2022 and 2023) resulted in 400FTE staff outputs scored, of which 199.64FTE were associated with a 3* or 4* quality output.

An analysis of the output author characteristics has not been conducted on this data.

10. How are you involving stakeholders/groups of interest in the EIA/development of the mechanism?

The process has been informed by:

1. Feedback received during the University's REF-lections post-submission evaluation conducted in 2022, involving focus groups and surveys across all staff and REF stakeholders
2. Co-development of the new scoring process involving discipline-specific Unit of Assessment leaders in each School
3. Co-development and approval of the new scoring process from the REF Strategy Group
4. Reflection and Continuous improvement planned at end of each scoring round, utilising feedback from stakeholders involved in the process
5. Sector good practice shared amongst Scottish REF Managers Group and ARMA colleagues.

11. What challenges have identified?

1. **The process is reliant on self-identification of research outputs by authors. This means there could be specific individuals or groups of individuals who do not engage with the process or declare outputs for consideration because they are time-limited or undervalue the quality.**

Mitigation [Communications]:

- a. Send wide-ranging and regular communications to target all output generating staff (including specific group email addresses to target specific groups)
- b. Reconcile Worktribe output repository with the respondent survey responses and proactively target non-responders
- c. Involve UoA leads and ADRIs to promote local communications and engagement with process via local forums including targeted discussions at MyContribution about output generation
- d. Ensure timeline avoids periods of high leave or heavy workload.

2. **The process allows for flexibility in the discipline-specific (UoA) quality thresholds at each stage of the process. This means there is risk of excluding some authors if their research output does not meet the unit threshold.**

Mitigation [Communication and transparent record keeping]:

- a. Clearly communicate the UoA-specific thresholds and the auditable rationale for applying a threshold cap
- b. Clearly communicate the principles of de-coupling staff from REF
- c. Clearly record all decisions relating to threshold cut-off
- d. Conduct analysis of data on threshold cut-off, post-process to determine if any unintended consequences.
- e. Retain flexibility in process to include more outputs at a lower threshold, at a later stage
- f. Ensure timeline avoids periods of high leave or heavy workload e.g. those with caring responsibilities may be absent during school holidays therefore avoid this period for the self-identification stage.

3. **The process is reliant on the appointment of expert panel members who can assess outputs fairly and equitably based on responsible assessment practices and EDI.**

Mitigation [Training and Development and transparent recruitment based on essential criteria]:

- a. Ensure that panel appointment criteria is appropriate and applied consistently
- b. Ensure that all panel members receive EDI panel briefings prior to assessment
- c. REF Team to attend all panel meetings to ensure consistency and adherence to responsible assessment, challenging non-compliance.

1. Are there been any specific concerns about differential impact on any of the Protected Characteristic groups or other groups of interest¹?

1. There could be groups of staff who are less likely to engage in the self-identification process because they are less likely to rate their own work of high-quality or because they have no time to engage in the process. This could include but is not limited to females, early career staff, technicians or those on leave or those with a high workload.
2. There is also risk that output panel assessors apply bias in their assessment of outputs based on author characteristics or subject bias.

2. What steps are being taken to mitigate concerns raised about differential impact?

Mitigation:

- a. Send wide-ranging and regular communications to target all output generating staff
- b. Reconcile Worktribe output repository with the respondent survey responses and proactively target non-responders (or those on long-term absence)
- c. Involve UoA leads and ADRIs to promote local communications and engagement with process including targeted discussion at MyContribution
- d. Promote responsible assessment and train all panel members in EDI prior to assessment
- e. Promote 'blind' assessment – removal of author characteristics

3. Can differential impact be justified based on positive action guidance?

REF29 is operating under a new principle of 'decoupling' staff and submissions. In practice this means that we do not need to ensure that all staff are represented in the output submission. It is therefore justifiable to have differential impact, however, in support of our University values, this process should aim to avoid differential impact by applying the mitigations.

¹ The Protected Characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010 are: Age, Disability, Race, Religion and Belief (including no belief), Sex, Sexual Orientation, Pregnancy and Maternity, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership. It is recommended that Deaf People and BSL Users be treated as a protected group. It maybe that the mechanism seeks to address other groups of interest e.g. access and inclusion.

4. The Equality Act 2010 includes a requirement to give 'due regard' to the public sector equality duty (PSED) in all functions. There is a specific duty to assess the impact of proposed new or revised policies and practices against three needs of the general duty. Use this section to outline relevant issues.

i) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation

ii) Advance equality of opportunity between people of different groups

iii) Foster good relations between people of different groups

5. Date EIA Completed and date for future review of mechanism

20 August 2025

If the mechanism includes data collection refer to Data Protection Guidance.

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