REF2029
Research Excellence Framework

Code of Practice

Institution name: Stranmillis University College, Belfast

Date of resubmission: 6th August 2026

Date of approval: 25th August 2026

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.

The current REF2029 CoP builds on the firm foundation of the REF2021 CoP which established an agreed process whereby all Senior Lecturers and Principal Lecturers with 20% of their workload contribution dedicated to research and scholarship are considered to have Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR).

This approach originated in an internal application and review exercise carried out in 2019, through which staff applied for SRR status and, once designated, undertook roles with a clear expectation of producing REF-eligible research outputs. Senior Lecturers and Principal Lecturers with the standard 10% allocation for research and scholarship are not considered to have SRR, and therefore do not carry an expectation of REF-quality research income generation or publication. This distinction formed the basis of the College's REF2021 Code of Practice, was agreed with the local branch of the University and College Union, and was approved by the College's governing body.

There is therefore a clear and robust differentiation, embedded within the workload allocation model, between those staff whose roles require REF-quality research activity (20% workload) and those for whom research and scholarship contribute to professional development but do not include expectations of REF-eligible outputs (10% workload).

As a small, specialist institution submitting to a single Unit of Assessment (Unit 23 – Education), the College must operate within significant financial constraints that currently limit the expansion of SRR-designated roles. Nevertheless, Stranmillis remains committed to supporting the development of all research-active staff. Should budgetary pressures ease and research income grow, the College will actively review the SRR framework and, where feasible, reopen a transparent process to broaden opportunities for staff to take on SRR roles in future REF cycles.

- **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 final approved REF2029 CoP will be made accessible to all staff via email (including those on career breaks – there are no staff based outside the UK). Staff will be invited to contact the research office if they have any questions.

  The CoP will be made available in alternative formats (e.g. large print) upon request to HR or the Research Office.

  Once approved, the REF2029 CoP will be published on the College research webpage and circulated by email to all staff.

- **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**.**

  Stranmillis University College promotes an inclusive environment, enabling the College to identify all staff who have significant responsibility for research (SRR), all staff who are independent researchers, and excellent research produced by staff across all protected groups.

  Particular care will be taken to ensure that all staff receive regular communication regarding REF2029 (including those who are currently absent from work/on career breaks). The College will also ensure that its REF policies and procedures are subject to ongoing Equality Impact Assessment so that any differential effects associated with protected characteristics, contractual status, working patterns or career stage can be identified and, where appropriate, mitigated.

  The processes developed for the purposes of REF2029 and especially those developed to identify staff with SRR, to determine research independence and to select outputs for REF submission are a component of the ongoing strategy to promote research and scholarship right across the College among all staff and students. All staff, whether or not they are included in the REF2029 submission, will continue to have full access to support from the Research Office e.g., access to training workshops, lunchtime research seminars, access to funding for research conferences etc.

  Stranmillis recognises the challenges of sustaining an inclusive research community within a small, specialist institution which has a single UoA submission. Budgetary pressures, a relatively flat staffing structure, limited promotion opportunities and teaching-intensive roles can restrict the time and resources available for research. Heavy teaching and administrative

workloads may limit opportunities to develop research profiles, secure funding, attend conferences or produce outputs. These constraints may affect staff differently depending on career stage, contract type and personal circumstances. Early-career researchers, part-time or fixed-term staff, and those returning from leave or career breaks may have had fewer opportunities to build research experience and networks. Limited staffing can also make it difficult to provide teaching cover or protected research time. Within these constraints, the College promotes an inclusive research culture where diverse roles and contributions are valued. Research support is available to all staff, including access to advice, training, mentoring, internal funding and collaborative opportunities. Activities will, where possible, accommodate flexible and part-time working. The College will take these challenges into account in REF2029 processes. Decisions on Significant Responsibility for Research, research independence and output selection are based on transparent criteria, not assumptions about contract type or personal circumstances. Equality Impact Assessments will be used to identify and address any differential impacts.

Stranmillis University College is committed to ensuring that staff on fixed-term or part-time contracts, including contract research staff, are treated equitably and not disadvantaged in relation to REF2029. Decisions on Significant Responsibility for Research, research independence and output selection will be based on role expectations, not contractual status or working pattern. These staff will have equal access to REF2029 information and, where relevant, to research support and development opportunities. Workload expectations and opportunities will be considered proportionately, taking account of contracted hours and the nature of the appointment. Communications and consultation will be arranged to enable participation by staff working different patterns or who are temporarily absent. The College will monitor its REF policies through Equality Impact Assessments to identify any differential effects on fixed-term or part-time staff and will take appropriate action where needed.

2. **Contextualisation within Institutional Policies:**

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

The College's REF2029 submission is an integral part of the most recent Research and Scholarship Strategy (2025-2028) whose mission is to "advance innovative, practitioner-focused research and scholarship of the highest international standards, generating demonstrable impact by informing policy, enhancing professional practice, and contributing to societal progress both nationally and internationally". In particular the first objective is to "engage in research and scholarship of the highest quality in terms of originality, significance and rigour" and its first action is to "make a high-quality College submission to REF2029, building on the successes of previous quality assurance exercises".

The CoP also aligns with the College's Equal Opportunities Policy whereby the College commits to provide employment equality to all, irrespective of "Gender, including gender reassignment; Marital or civil partnership status; Having or not having dependants; Religious belief or political opinion; Race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins,

being an Irish Traveller); Disability; Sexual orientation; Age; Trade union; membership or non-membership; Employment status." The College also promotes equality of opportunity through its commitment to Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. In addition, Stranmillis is recognised as a Disability Confident Employer by the Department for Work and Pensions, demonstrating its proactive responsibility to equality and inclusion for staff and applicants with additional needs.The College's CoP reflects and is aligned with its wider commitments under the *Concordat to Support Research Integrity* and the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.* In the case of the former, *the Concordat to Support Research Integrity*, the College fully supports the Concordat, the key principles of which are as follows:

> Commitment 1: To uphold the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research;
>
> Commitment 2: To ensure that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards;
>
> Commitment 3: To support a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice and support for the development of researchers;
>
> Commitment 4: To use transparent, timely, robust and fair processes to deal with allegations of research misconduct when they arise;
>
> Commitment 5: To work together to strengthen the integrity of research and to review progress regularly and openly.

In the case of the latter, the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*, the College has confirmed its commitment to its three core principles, namely:

> Principle 1: Environment and Culture: Excellent research requires a supportive and inclusive research culture
>
> Principle 2: Employment: Researchers are recruited, employed and managed under conditions that recognise and value their contributions
>
> Principle 3: Professional and career development: Professional and career development are integral to enabling researchers to develop their full potential

Further details of both, including recent annual statements, can be found on the College's Research Integrity webpage: https://www.stran.ac.uk/research/research-integrity/

3. **Update on Actions Since REF 2021**:

- Summarise key actions taken since REF 2021 to address issues or recommendations from previous EIAs.

There were no issues or recommendations arising from the 2021 EIA. However, a key lesson learned from the experience of REF2021 was around the degree of flexibility and support required for staff due to personal circumstances including maternity leave, caring responsibilities and periods of absence through sickness. This has led to a change of

approach in which there is now a much great degree of understanding on the part of managers and increased awareness of the impact that such factors can have on research activity and outputs. In 2025 we also joined the British Academy Early Career Network (North East and Northern Ireland Cluster) which describes itself as "an inclusive, researcher-led membership body accessible to all UK-based early career researchers (ECRs) working in the humanities and social sciences - regardless of their funding source or background". This offers additional professional development and networking opportunities to our ECR staff.

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.

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.

      Stranmillis University College will use the workload allocation attached to each eligible teaching and research contract to identify contracts with Significant Responsibility for Research. All permanent lecturing staff, whether employed on a full-time or part-time basis, whose workload allocation includes 20% for research and scholarship will be considered to have SRR. Within these roles, the production of REF-eligible research outputs and sustained engagement in research activity constitute clear expectations of the job role.

      Permanent lecturing staff with the standard allocation of 10% for research and scholarship will not be considered to have SRR. For these staff, the research and scholarship allocation is intended to support professional development, engagement with scholarship and the enhancement of teaching and professional practice. Their contractual role does not carry an expectation that they will produce REF-eligible research outputs, generate research income or sustain the level of research activity expected of staff with SRR.

      The distinction between the two categories is therefore based entirely on the current responsibilities and expectations associated with the contract and workload allocation. It is not based on an assessment of an individual staff member's previous research performance, publication record, success in securing research funding or perceived likelihood of producing outputs for REF2029. A staff member will not be identified as having SRR merely because they have previously produced high-quality research, nor will a member of staff with a 20% research and scholarship allocation cease to be identified as having SRR because of their level of past research performance.

      The same criteria will be applied consistently to full-time and part-time staff. Where a member of staff works part-time, the 20% research and scholarship allocation will be calculated proportionately in relation to their contracted hours.

The SRR criteria used for REF2029 represent a continuation of the framework established for REF2021. The original framework arose from an internal application and review process undertaken in 2019 and was subsequently agreed with the local branch of the University and College Union and approved through the College's governance structures.

As the criteria and underlying workload arrangements have not changed materially for REF2029, the College did not establish a new institution-wide application process. However, all members of staff whose teaching and research contracts were identified as meeting the SRR criteria were consulted individually in December 2025. Each member of staff was informed of the criteria, the basis on which their contract had been identified as carrying SRR and the implications for the College's REF2029 volume measure. Staff were invited to raise questions or concerns and to confirm whether they were content with the proposed procedure. All staff consulted responded positively and confirmed that they were content with the approach.

The continuation of the SRR framework was also considered through the College's established REF and research governance arrangements. Any future material change to the criteria or process for identifying SRR will be subject to appropriate consultation with affected staff and recognised staff representatives before implementation.

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

  All SRR staff were contacted individually in December 2025 and given the option to revert to 10%/non-SRR status. Those permanent members of staff on research-only contracts (n=2, FTE 1.4) were also informed in December 2025 of their eligibility to form part of the REF2029 submission.

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

  n/a

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

     This process has been devised and agreed by the REF Steering Group, whose role is set out below through its terms of reference:

     1. To keep abreast of REF guidance and criteria, and take any necessary action.
     2. To liaise as necessary with the Department for the Economy (NI funding department) and central REF panel.

3. To oversee and evaluate the preparation for REF2029, developing appropriate criteria to judge the quality of possible outputs and approving the final selection.
4. To be responsible for considering and drafting the criteria/processes to identify staff with significant responsibility for research, to determine research independence and to select outputs for REF submission.
5. To oversee the development of the College's REF Code of Practice, and ensure its communication to all staff across the College in consultation with Human Resources.
6. To facilitate and review Equality Impact Assessments at appropriate stages of the submission preparations in relation to the potential impact of the Code of Practice processes (to identify staff with significant responsibility for research, to determine research independence and to select outputs for REF submission) on the nine equality categories as defined in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998: religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender, disability and dependency.
7. To oversee the completion of the College's REF PEC submission and to review research-related metrics that contribute to the PEC profile.
8. To oversee the selection, coordination and completion of the College's REF impact case studies.
9. To provide regular updates to relevant College committees and wider staff on the College's preparations for REF2029.

Executive Members	**Rationale**	**Decision-making/Advisory**
Director of Research & Scholarship	Overall responsibility for REF submission	Decision-making
Research Impact Coordinator	Responsibility for REF impact case studies	Decision-making
CREU Research Fellow	Core member of Research Office team – administrative support	Decision-making
HR Manager	Expertise in Equality and Diversity, EIAs	Decision-making
Finance & Development Officer	Research Office team member – administrative support	Decision-making
In Attendance		
Research Office Administrator	Research Office team member (secretariat)	In Attendance

- **Training**: Detail training provided.

  All members of the REF Steering Group received training on Equality and Diversity (Section 75 requirements) through the NICAL online training portal. This training was completed by all members in December 2025.

3. **Appeals:**

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

  SRR status at Stranmillis is determined solely by workload allocation: all staff with a 20% research and scholarship allocation automatically hold SRR, and those with 10% do not. Appeals are therefore unlikely, but may be made where a staff member believes a procedural error or factual inaccuracy has occurred in the allocation of workload.

  Appeals should be submitted in writing to the Director of Research and Scholarship (Email: n.purdy@stran.ac.uk) within 20 working days of notification. A three-person panel (HR representative, senior academic independent of the decision, and one REF Steering Group member without prior involvement) will review the appeal and issue a written outcome within 20 working days. The decision is final.

  Any staff member wishing to opt out of SRR may request a reversion to the 10% research allocation through normal workload processes, with associated adjustments to teaching/administrative duties.

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

     The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was integrated throughout the development of the SRR identification process to ensure that decisions were transparent, role-based, and free from bias. Analysis of staff data confirmed that SRR status at Stranmillis is determined solely by the contractual 20% workload allocation for research and scholarship, minimising the risk of differential impact across Section 75 groups. The EIA highlighted the need for clear communication, consistent application of workload data, and mechanisms for staff on leave or with individual circumstances to receive equivalent information. No adverse impacts were identified, but the College has committed to ongoing monitoring of the composition of SRR staff and to providing equitable research development opportunities for all staff, irrespective of SRR status.

Part 3: Determining Research Independence

(Required for all participating institutions)

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

   Under REF2029, research independence must be established for staff on research-only (ACEMPFUN 2) contracts in order for their contracts to contribute to the volume measure. An independent researcher is defined as someone who undertakes self-directed research, shaping

their own research agenda rather than working solely on a programme directed by another individual.

Consistent with the REF guidance, research assistants and research support staff are not considered independent, except in exceptional cases where they clearly meet the indicators below.

Given the context of Stranmillis University College as a small specialist institution, a research-only staff member will be considered independent when they can demonstrate at least one of the following indicators, supported by appropriate evidence:

- Acting as Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator on an internally or externally funded research project
  Evidence may include grant award letters, project proposals, or PI/Co-I confirmation from funders.
- Holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship requiring the design and delivery of an autonomous programme of research
  Evidence: fellowship terms, award letters, programme descriptions.
- Leading a research centre or cluster with responsibility for shaping its research direction
  Evidence: centre terms of reference, leadership role statements, project documentation.

In accordance with REF guidance, being named on research outputs is not sufficient evidence of independence.

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

The determination of research independence for research-only staff will be undertaken by the REF Steering Group**,** drawing on evidence held by the Research Office and any additional documentation provided by the staff member.

Process and Roles

- The Research Office will compile relevant grant, fellowship and leadership evidence for each research-only staff member.
- The REF Steering Group will review the evidence against the independence indicators and agree a determination.
- Members involved in line management or direct supervision of the staff member will not participate in the decision.
- Where necessary, external advice may be sought to ensure impartiality, particularly given the size of the institution.

Timelines and Communication

- Determinations will be made sufficiently early to allow staff to request review if needed and by December 2026 at the latest, after which the outcomes will be communicated to

relevant staff by end of January 2027.Each staff member will receive the decision in writing, accompanied by a brief explanation of the evidence considered and the reasons for the determination. The written notification will explain how the staff member may raise an informal query or submit a formal appeal, the eligible grounds for appeal, the relevant timescales and the person to whom an appeal should be addressed.

By way of consultation, all research-only members of staff were consulted individually in December 2025. Each member of staff was informed of the draft criteria for identifying research independence, as well as the decision-making process and the appeals procedure. Staff were invited to raise questions or concerns and to confirm whether they were content with the proposed procedure. All staff consulted responded positively and confirmed that they were content with the approach. Given the very small number of research-only staff at Stranmillis, few cases are expected. Nonetheless, this process ensures clarity, fairness and full compliance with REF2029 requirements.

2. **Staff, Committees, and Training:**
   - *If this section is the same as Part 2, please just refer to the earlier text.*
   - **Roles and Responsibilities**: Define roles and responsibilities of individuals and committees, distinguishing between advisory and decision-making roles.

     See Part 2 above
   - **Training**: Detail training provided.

All members of the REF Steering Group received training on Equality and Diversity (Section 75 requirements) through the NICAL online training portal. This training was completed by all members in December 2025.

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

     A staff member may raise an informal query with the Research Office within ten working days of receiving their decision to seek clarification or correct any factual error. This does not affect their right to submit a formal appeal.

     Formal appeals

     A staff member may submit a formal appeal if their contract is determined not to meet the criteria for research independence, or if there has been a substantive change to their role. Appeals must be submitted in writing within 20 working days to the Director of Research and Scholarship (Email: n.purdy@stran.ac.uk) clearly stating the grounds and including any supporting evidence.

Appeals may be made on the basis of procedural error, factual inaccuracy, incorrect or inconsistent application of criteria, failure to consider relevant evidence, or evidence of bias or unfairness. Appeals cannot be made solely on disagreement with the criteria themselves.

Appeals process and outcome

Appeals will be considered by an independent panel with no prior involvement in the original decision. The panel will review the evidence and determine whether the criteria and procedures were applied fairly and correctly. The panel may uphold the original decision, overturn it, or refer it for reconsideration. The outcome will be provided in writing, normally within 20 working days, and will be final under the REF2029 Code of Practice.

3. **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.

The EIA informed the development of the research independence procedures by ensuring that the criteria are objective, evidence-based, and aligned with REF2029 guidance. Staff data confirmed that the number of research-only contracts is very small, limiting the risk of systemic disadvantage, but the EIA process emphasised the importance of publishing clear independence indicators and ensuring that all evidence (e.g., PI roles, fellowships, leadership activities) is assessed consistently. The EIA also highlighted the need to avoid assumptions based on seniority or authorship practices, which can disproportionately affect some protected groups. As a result, the College has implemented transparent decision-making through the REF Steering Group, conflict-of-interest protections, and written communication of outcomes. Ongoing monitoring will ensure that any future changes to research-only staffing are assessed for equality impact.

Part 4: Selecting outputs

1. **Policies and Procedures**:
   - **Identifying substantive link to outputs**

For REF2029, all submitted outputs must demonstrate a substantive link to Stranmillis University College. A substantive link exists where the College has enabled the research that led to the output and where there is an eligible employment relationship with at least one author who made a significant research contribution to the output.

An eligible employment relationship requires:

- A minimum of 0.2 FTE for at least 12 months' continuous employment**,** and
- A role with an explicit expectation of research activity (not scholarship-only or teaching-only).

A substantive link may be established in either of two ways:

1. The eligible employment relationship was in place at the point the output was first made publicly available (normally 1 Jan 2021 – 31 Dec 2028).
2. The eligible employment relationship existed before publication**,** during the period in which the research was carried out. Panels will confirm the allowable time-limited period (anticipated to be two years for most outputs, up to five for longform outputs).

Where the link occurs before publication, evidence may include (as defined by the main panels):

- internal research support funding,
- presentations of work-in-progress,
- external research grants supporting the work.

Outputs sole-authored by, or where the only link to the institution is through: postgraduate research students; visiting or honorary staff; teaching-only staff; or those with no research expectation cannot be submitted.

Exceptional cases: Outputs produced by staff on teaching-only contracts may be submitted only where the College has provided dedicated time and resources for that specific research activity and prior clearance has been obtained from the Director of Research and Scholarship.

Full guidance on substantive links is available at: https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/section-4-contributions-to-knowledge-and-understanding-cku-guidance/

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

Stranmillis University College may submit outputs authored by former staff where a substantive link between the College and the research can be demonstrated in accordance with the REF2029 guidance. Outputs will be considered eligible where the former staff member held an eligible employment relationship (minimum 0.2 FTE for 12 months with an explicit research expectation) either at the point the output was first made publicly available or during the period in which the research was carried out**,** subject to the time-limited period to be confirmed by the REF panels.

Former staff may have left the College through resignation, retirement**,** voluntary severance**,** voluntary redundancy or the natural expiry of a fixed-term contract. Outputs linked to these staff will be treated consistently and assessed against the same substantive link criteria. In cases of compulsory redundancy, outputs may only be submitted where this complies with the REF2029 rules (i.e., outputs produced while an eligible employment relationship existed and where the substantive link did not occur exclusively before publication). Where applicable, the College will document its rationale as required by the REF team.

Decisions on the eligibility of outputs by former staff will be made by the REF Steering Group, drawing on evidence held by the Research Office (e.g., employment records, research support, grant documentation, work-in-progress evidence). All decisions will be recorded for audit purposes and applied consistently across similar cases. The College will keep these procedures under review and update them if further detail is published in the REF2029 panel criteria.

Full guidance on substantive links is available at: https://2029.ref.ac.uk/guidance/section-4-contributions-to-knowledge-and-understanding-cku-guidance/

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

N/A Stranmillis University College will submit to a single Unit of Assessment (UoA23).

- **Procedures for supporting diversity of outputs**

As a small specialist institution submitting to a single Unit of Assessment (Unit 23: Education), Stranmillis University College is committed to ensuring that its REF2029 submission reflects the full diversity of research output types produced across the eligible staff group. In line with REF2029 guidance, the College recognises that high-quality research may take a wide range of forms, including practice-based outputs, pedagogical research, digital artefacts, reports, evaluations, and longform publications. To support this diversity, the Research Office will maintain an internal register of diverse outputs, and ensure that the REF Steering Group gives equal consideration to all forms of research, consistent with the principle that no output type is inherently favoured. This enables the College to showcase the richness and breadth of educational research undertaken by its staff. This commitment extends to eligible outputs produced in Irish, Irish Sign Language or another recognised language, which will be considered on their intrinsic research quality and will not be treated less favourably because of the language in which they are produced.

- **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.

Stranmillis University College has a longstanding practice of ensuring that REF submissions reflect the holistic and collective research activity of all eligible staff within its single submitting Unit (Unit 23: Education). For REF2029, the REF Steering Group will continue this approach by ensuring that candidate outputs map consistently against the College's research strategy, internal funding schemes, collaborative projects, and externally commissioned research. This process ensures that the final selection of outputs will be representative of the full spectrum of research undertaken across the assessment period, including different methodologies, themes, partnerships and forms of knowledge generation. The Steering Group will document this mapping process, identify any emerging gaps and record transparent reasons for the final

selections, so that the submission fairly represents the collective research contribution of the Stranmillis research community and provides a clear evidential basis for the Statement of Representation within the unit-level SPRE submission. The mapping and review process outlined above will also provide the evidential basis for the Statement of Representation included within the College's unit-level Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE) submission. The Statement of Representation will explain how the final portfolio of submitted outputs reflects the range and diversity of research undertaken within Unit 23 during the REF assessment period, including the College's research themes and structures, different methodologies and output types, collaborative and commissioned research, and partnerships with policy, professional and community organisations.

The Statement of Representation will be developed from the records maintained by the Research Office and the REF Steering Group during the output-selection process, including the mapping of candidate outputs against the College's research strategy and activity, the identification of any gaps in the emerging portfolio, and the reasons recorded for final selection decisions. Where a significant area of research activity is not fully reflected in the submitted outputs, the Statement will provide an appropriate explanation.

Responsibility for preparing the Statement of Representation will rest with the Director of Research and Scholarship, supported by the Research Office. It will be reviewed and approved by the REF Steering Group to ensure that it accurately reflects both the research undertaken within the submitting unit and the implementation of the robust, transparent and fair procedures set out in this Code of Practice. The Statement of Representation will provide contextual evidence for the assessment of the wider unit-level SPRE statement and will not introduce new or retrospective criteria for the selection of outputs.

Policies and procedures and responsible research assessment practice

Stranmillis University College is committed to responsible research assessment across all processes relating to output selection for its single UoA submission. In accordance with REF2029 guidance, the College will not rely on journal-based metrics, citation counts or other quantitative indicators as proxies for research quality. Staff involved in selection will receive training in responsible research assessment, equality, diversity and inclusion, and the principles of DORA and COARA (i.e., Stranmillis adheres to the principles of DORA and COARA by avoiding journal-based metrics, assessing research outputs on their intrinsic quality, recognising a broad range of output types and contributions, valuing qualitative peer review, promoting transparency and ensuring that assessment processes support responsible and inclusive research practice.) All decisions taken by the REF Steering Group will be evidence-based, transparent, and sufficiently recorded for audit purposes. By embedding these principles, the College ensures that the assessment and selection of outputs remain fair, reflective of the full breadth of research undertaken, and aligned with best practice in the sector.

2. Staff, Committees, and Training:

- *If this section is the same as Part 2 or 3, please just refer to the earlier text.*

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

See Part 2 above

- **Training**: Detail training provided.

All members of the REF Steering Group received training on Equality and Diversity (Section 75 requirements) through the NICAL online training portal. This training was completed by all members in December 2025.

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

The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been integrated throughout the development of Stranmillis' procedures for selecting outputs for REF2029. Analysis of staff data indicated a small and relatively homogeneous eligible staff group, but the EIA highlighted the importance of ensuring that output selection processes do not inadvertently disadvantage staff from any Section 75 group, particularly in relation to research method, output format, career stage, or contractual history. As a result, the College has adopted selection procedures that explicitly value a diversity of output types, avoid reliance on metrics, and ensure that outputs are assessed solely on quality. The REF Steering Group will document and review selection decisions to identify any emerging patterns that could indicate unequal impact, and adjustments will be made where necessary to ensure that the final submission remains representative of the holistic research activity of all eligible staff. This approach embeds equality considerations directly into policy and practice and ensures that the submission process remains fair, transparent and inclusive.

Outputs in Recognised Languages

The College's Equality Impact Assessment also considered the treatment of research outputs produced in recognised languages. Given the institutional and legislative context of Northern Ireland, particular consideration has been given to the Irish language and its recognised status under the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022.

Stranmillis has recently undertaken several funded research projects relating to Irish-medium education and Irish-medium vocational education and training. However, at the time of preparing this Code, no eligible outputs produced wholly or substantially in Irish, or in any other recognised language, had been identified for possible submission to REF2029.

Should an eligible output in Irish, Irish Sign Language, or another recognised language be identified, it will be considered on an equal basis with an output in English and will not be treated less favourably because of the language in which it was produced. The REF Steering Group will follow the applicable REF2029 assessment and translation arrangements and will take appropriate account of the relevant legislative provisions protecting and promoting the language. Any costs or practical

arrangements associated with translation or assessment will not influence the decision on whether the output should be considered for submission.

The treatment of outputs in recognised languages will remain under review through the Equality Impact Assessment process, including where research is undertaken collaboratively with institutions in jurisdictions in which a language has a different or additional protected legal status.

Part 5: Appendices

1. **Equality Impact Assessment**
2. **Referenced material in the CoP**

REF 2029
Research Excellence Framework

Appendix 1:

Equality Impact Assessment

Question	Response
1. Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed	Stranmillis University College REF2029 Code of Practice
2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event	A REF Code of Practice sets out fair, transparent processes for REF participation. Its aims are to ensure equality, consistency and accountability in identifying staff with significant responsibility for research, determining research independence, selecting outputs at unit level, and conducting EIAs. Objectives include documenting governance and decision-making, training panel members on EDI and responsible assessment, engaging and consulting staff, maintaining robust audit trails, aligning with institutional policies and legal duties, and publishing accessible, proportionate information to support scrutiny and compliance.
3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy? (e.g. with relevant groups and stakeholders)	As the criteria and processes for identifying staff with Significant Responsibility for Research remain materially unchanged from those established for REF2021, a new all-staff consultation was not undertaken. Instead, all staff currently identified as having Significant Responsibility for Research were consulted individually in December 2025. They were informed of the criteria, the basis on which their roles had been identified as carrying SRR and the proposed process for REF2029. They were invited to raise questions or concerns, identify any potential adverse impact and confirm whether they were content with the procedure. All staff consulted responded positively. Separate consultation groups for staff from individual Section 75 protected groups were not established because of the College's small size, the very small numbers within some categories and the consequent risk of identifying individual members of staff. The EIA was therefore informed by the individual engagement with affected SRR staff, advice from Human Resources, institutional equality-monitoring data, the College's experience of REF2021 and relevant evidence from the wider higher education sector. Staff consulted were able to request a confidential discussion or any necessary reasonable adjustment. No accessibility requirements or adverse equality impacts were

	identified through this engagement. The feedback received confirmed support for the continuation of the existing SRR process and informed further clarification of the Code. The EIA will remain under review throughout the REF2029 process. Further engagement will take place where appropriate at key stages, particularly if any material change is proposed to the criteria or procedures, when research-independence decisions are communicated and during the development of the provisional output portfolio. Once approved, the Code of Practice will be circulated to all staff and published on the College's research webpage.
4. Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?	The policy affects all academic staff who meet the REF eligibility criteria, particularly those with significant responsibility for research or whose work contributes to the Unit of Assessment. It may also impact staff with protected characteristics where contractual status, research independence, or output selection intersects with equality considerations. Professional services staff involved in REF processes are indirectly affected through governance, data handling and decision-making responsibilities. The University College senior team and Governing Body are key stakeholders in relation to the policy also.
5. What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy/funding activity/event?	Impact will be monitored through regular analysis of staff data by Section 75 categories, review of committee decisions, and checks on the representativeness of output selection. Findings will be discussed by the REF Steering Group, with actions recorded and implemented. The EIA will be reviewed at key REF milestones, updated where necessary, and reported transparently to ensure any unintended disadvantage is identified early and addressed promptly. As part of this EIA, the College has considered whether its procedures could disadvantage research produced in a recognised language other than English (including Irish Sign Language), with particular attention to Irish due to its legal status in Northern Ireland. While Stranmillis undertakes research related to Irish-medium education, no eligible REF2029 outputs in Irish, Irish Sign Language or other recognised languages have been identified, meaning no differential impact can currently be determined. Should

	such outputs arise, they will be assessed on the same basis as English-language outputs, without disadvantage, and in line with REF guidance and relevant legislation; translation requirements will not be used as grounds for exclusion. This approach also applies to collaborative outputs with institutions in other jurisdictions, and the position will be reviewed as the EIA and output portfolio develop.

Section 75 Protected Characteristic Group	Is there a potential for positive or negative impact?	Please explain and give examples of any evidence/data used	Action to address negative impact (e.g., adjustment to the policy)
Religious belief	At present, all staff with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) identify as Christian, and there are no SRR staff from minority faith groups. As a result, there is no current evidence of differential impact. However, processes must still ensure that staff of any religious belief would be treated equitably should SRR eligibility expand in future, particularly regarding workload expectations, consultation times, and REF-related meetings coinciding with religious observance.	Analysis of HR monitoring data confirms a Christian-only SRR cohort and no declared requests for religious accommodations affecting research commitments. Given the small cohort, this limits the ability to detect differential impacts, and the EIA therefore considers *potential* rather than actual effects.	Ensure processes remain religion-neutral; avoid scheduling REF meetings on major religious festivals; offer flexible and asynchronous consultation options; and monitor future SRR changes for any emerging patterns linked to religious belief.
Political opinion	No direct negative impact is anticipated, as SRR status and REF processes are unrelated to political opinion. However, internal perceptions of fairness in a small institution require care to ensure decisions cannot	HR data indicates political opinion is not used as part of any employment or workload decision-making. No evidence of differential research opportunities based on political views.	Reinforce neutrality by documenting decisions clearly, maintaining transparent criteria, and ensuring REF Steering Group members complete EDI training.

	be construed as influenced by political affiliation.		
Race	All current SRR staff identify as White and there are no staff from minority ethnic backgrounds within the SRR cohort. Therefore, no current differential impact is evident. However, lack of racial diversity may limit the College's ability to identify potential structural barriers. Future SRR processes must remain sensitive to the risk that minority ethnic staff, should they join or progress into SRR roles, could face additional challenges in workload allocation, research opportunities or output recognition.	HR monitoring data confirms that the present SRR cohort is racially homogeneous. The small institutional size restricts trend analysis, so the EIA focuses on potential sector-wide risks. REF 2021 EDAP evidence indicates minority ethnic researchers can face systemic disadvantages in research participation, career progression, and visibility of outputs.	Maintain race-neutral and transparent SRR criteria; monitor future SRR composition for emerging disparities; ensure output selection criteria recognise diverse research methods and topics; and continue to provide equitable access to research development support for all staff regardless of background or ethnicity.
Age	Both early-career and older staff could experience differential impact. ECRs may have fewer outputs, while older staff may have varying research intensity depending on role changes or caring responsibilities.	Analysis of workload model data shows no age-related criteria in SRR assignment. Sector research signals age-related variation in research expectations.	Ensure output selection focuses on quality rather than volume; provide tailored mentoring or other supports if necessary; review participation of different age groups in REF-related decision processes.
Gender	Potential risks include gendered patterns in workload allocation, time for research, and representation in research leadership, as reflected in	Internal workload data shows equitable allocation, but national REF data indicates women often face structural constraints	Monitor gender distribution across SRR and submitted outputs; ensure selection panels are gender-balanced; maintain supportive

	sector-wide EDAP findings.	affecting research productivity.	policies for staff returning from maternity, parental leave or career break.
Disability	Disabled staff may face additional barriers to research time, access needs, or flexibility around REF deadlines. Potential risk arises in output selection if adjustments are not understood or accommodated.	HR records show that no staff included in the REF submission have declared a disability. Sector data indicates disabled researchers often experience uneven access to research opportunities but to date no concerns have been raised during consultations.	Offer voluntary disclosure routes; adapt meeting formats; provide flexibility in deadlines; record and consider reasonable adjustments within output selection processes.
Marital status	Marital status itself is not directly connected to REF processes, though associated caring responsibilities or work-life balance patterns may affect research time.	HR data shows no correlation between marital status and SRR assignment. No concerns raised during staff consultations.	Offer flexible participation in REF workshops and meetings; ensure communication reaches staff with non-standard working patterns.
Sexual orientation	No direct discriminatory impact is anticipated, but there is a need to ensure LGBTQ+ staff feel equally able to participate in REF consultations, committees and output development.	Anonymous HR monitoring shows representation across sexual orientation categories. Sector evidence emphasises ensuring inclusive cultures in research environments.	Strict confidentiality in all data handling; reinforcement of inclusive values; ensure REF committees receive EDI training.
Dependants	Staff with caring responsibilities may have less flexibility for research activity, deadlines, or participation in REF-related meetings, increasing risk of indirect disadvantage.	Workload data demonstrates consistent SRR allocation irrespective of caring status. Informal staff feedback indicates caring responsibilities occasionally restrict	Provide meeting recordings, hybrid attendance options, and extended consultation windows; offer equitable access to research development opportunities; avoid

		attendance at research events.	clustering key REF deadlines during school holiday periods where possible.