

REF 2029

Research Excellence Framework

**Welcome to the REF 2029 Town
Hall on the guidance for the
Volume Measure &
Codes of Practice**

REF 2029

Research Excellence Framework

REF 2029 Town Hall

Volume measure guidance

Codes of practice guidance

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What is the Research Excellence Framework?

REF is owned and led by the four UK higher education funding bodies



- It:
 - informs allocation of around £2bn of block-grant funding each year
 - provides accountability for public investment in research
 - continually evolves, alongside our research base
 - (given the connection to allocation of funds) inevitably drives behaviour and therefore is a significant policy instrument across the UK

Principles and functions for REF 2029:

1. REF should fulfil the following purposes:

- **Inform the allocation** of block-grant research funding to HEIs based on research quality
- Provide **accountability for public investment** in research and produce evidence of the benefits of this investment
- Provide **insight into the health of research** in HEIs in the UK.

2. REF should underpin:

- A research system that produces **high-quality, rigorous** research that is **open** to all;
- An **inclusive and collaborative** research system that supports a diversity of people, ideas, institutions, methodologies, outputs, and activities; and
- An **engaged and impactful** research system that connects research with wider society to bring about positive socio-economic change.

3. REF decision making should be driven by:

- **Robustness** of assessment outcomes
- Impact of the system on **research culture**
- Ensuring that the **bureaucratic burden** of the system is proportionate.

From Initial Decisions published in June 2023.



Volume Measure Guidance

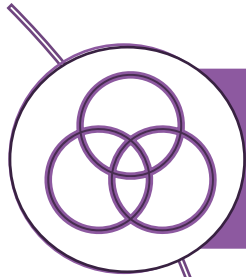
published 16 January 2025

What is the Volume Measure for?

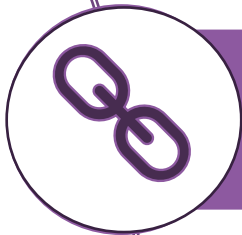
The volume measure

- allows REF to calculate **how many outputs and impact case studies** an HEI should submit for each UoA, proportionate to its research capacity
- gives a **proxy** for research capacity
- provides information on size and shape of the sector
- the funding bodies **may** also use the volume measure to inform the allocation of block grant funding.
- **does not** determine whose outputs are “REF eligible”
 - outputs are not tied to the volume measure, encouraging the submission of a wider range of outputs

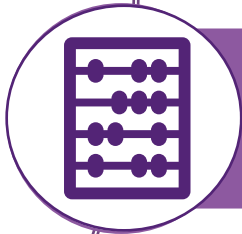
Key changes in REF 2029



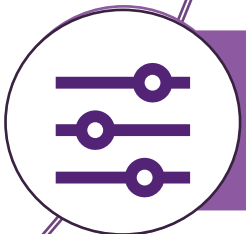
The Volume Measure will be gathered directly from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Staff Record



Breaking the link between individuals and the REF submission and focussing on assessment in each disciplinary area



The inclusion of a specific contract in the calculation does not dictate whether an output or impact case study can be included in the submission, or which Unit of Assessment it should be assigned to



Individual Staff Circumstances are not a feature of REF 2029, significantly reducing the burden of the exercise.

Technical Detail

HESA Fields

The metric used in the volume measure is derived from specific HESA fields.

Contract.CONFTE

Percentage of full-time equivalent year

Contract.REFQUALCON

Contracts that contribute to the volume measure

Contract.REFUOA2029

Identifies UoA associated with contracts

Note: contracts below 0.2 CONFTE are included in the volume measure.

Technical detail



Calculating the number of submission outputs

The volume measure is calculated by averaging the total CONFTE for the two included years of the HESA Staff record (2025-26 and 2026-27).

The number of outputs required in a submission is determined by multiplying the volume measure by 2.5 at UoA level. The result is then rounded to the nearest whole number.

- A UoA with a volume measure of 10 would need to submit 25 outputs (10 x 2.5 = 25)
- A UoA has a volume measure of 7.3, the submission requirement would be 18 outputs (7.3 x 2.5 = 18.25, rounded to the nearest whole number)
- A UoA has a volume measure of 5, the submission requirement would be 13 outputs (5 x 2.5 = 12.5, rounded to the nearest whole number)

Note: More information to follow on calculating the number of impact case studies

Contracts included in the Volume Measure

- Academic staff: primary employment function 'teaching and research' (ACEMPFUN 3) or 'research only' (ACEMPFUN 2), as recorded in the HESA Staff record ACEMPFUN field.
- Payroll and REF period: the staff member is on the payroll of the submitting institution within the REF period (i.e., academic year 2025-26 to 2026-27 for the relevant HESA Staff record collections).
- Must meet criteria for SRR or RI
- Marked with REFQUALCON flag in HESA Staff record
- 'Teaching only' contracts not included

Codes of Practice (CoP)

- . Institutional CoP required for REF 2029
- . Framework of principles for key decisions
- . Applied to identification of SRR and RI contracts

Identifying Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR)

- **Criteria for identifying SRR:**
 - Objective: Based on clear, measurable factors
 - Inclusive and non-discriminatory: Applied fairly and consistently
 - Transparent: Clearly communicated and accessible

Identifying contracts with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR)

- All eligible 'teaching and research' (ACEMPFUN 3) contracts with SRR should be included in the REF 2029 volume measure.
- **Where 'teaching and research' (ACEMPFUN 3) contracts do not precisely identify all contracts with SRR**, submitting HEIs must develop process, procedures and criteria for identifying SRR.
 - developed in consultation with staff and their representatives
 - documented in the institution's Code of Practice
 - contracts with SRR then marked as REFQUALCON in the HESA Staff record

SRR definition

- Contracts with significant responsibility for research are those for whom explicit time and resources are made available to engage actively in independent research, and that is an expectation of the job role.

‘Explicit time and resources are made available’.

- a specific proportion of time allocated for research, as determined in the context of the institution’s practices, and applied in a consistent way
- research allocation in a workload model or equivalent

To engage actively in independent research’.

- eligibility to apply for external research funding as the lead or co-applicant
- access to research leave or sabbaticals
- membership of research centres or institutes within the HEI

‘And that is an expectation of the job role’.

- current research responsibilities as indicated in, for example, career pathways or stated objectives
- expectations of research by role as indicated in, for example, job descriptions and appraisals

Identifying contracts with research independence (RI)

- **Research Independence** - All CoP must outline policies and procedures for identifying whether Research Only contracts demonstrate research independence.
- Research independence is when the staff **member undertakes self-directed research**, rather than primarily carrying out another individual's research programme.

Indicators of research independence

- Examples of indicators are provided in the policy
- HEIs have flexibility in setting their own criteria and documenting this in their Code of Practice.
- However, criteria and a process that routinely excludes staff who meet most of these indicators would likely be considered inappropriate.
- Research independence should be considered persistent
- Identifying research independence might vary across Units of Assessment (UoAs) due to disciplinary or employment practices.

Allocating eligible contracts to UoAs

- UoA assignment
- Staff with multiple contracts
- Annual variation
- HESA cost centres
- Audit

Variations

- List of variations provided
 - Sabbaticals
 - Staff with joint HEI and NHS appointments
 - Pensioned staff
 - Unpaid leave and secondment
 - Secondment to another UK HEI
 - Staff on hourly or daily pay
 - Staff working outside the UK
 - Multiple contracts
- More information about sabbaticals and secondments to come.
- Help support accuracy in determining the Volume Measure



Code of Practice Guidance

published 16 January 2025

Overview

- **Introduction to Code of Practice (CoP)**
 - Requirement for REF 2029
 - Sets a minimum standard for participation
 - Must be approved by funding bodies

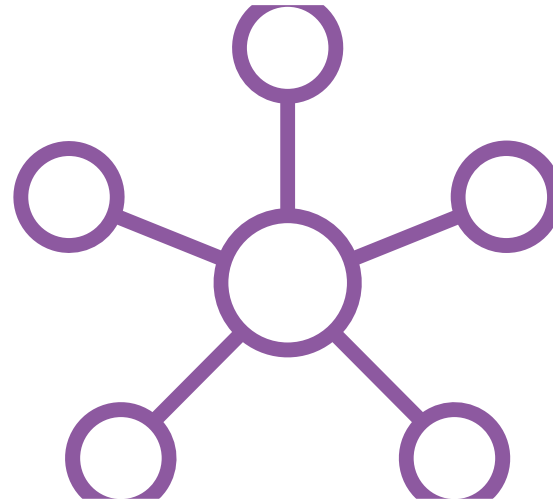
Principles of CoP

CoP built on three core principles:



Robustness

Accurate reflection
of the sector



Transparency

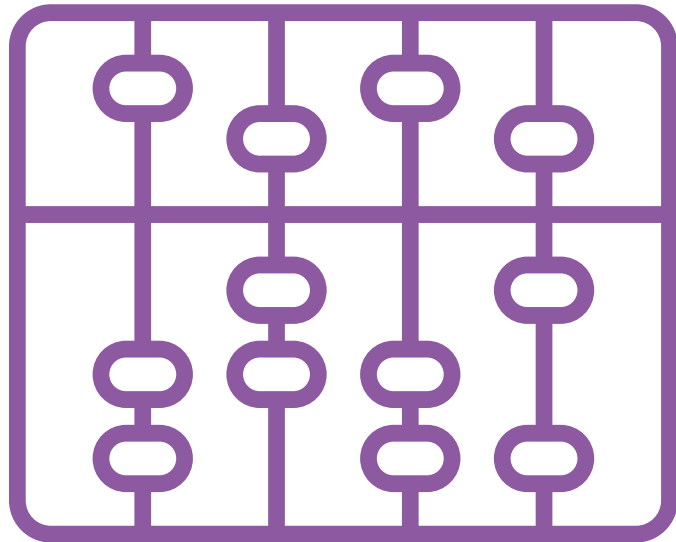
Clear decision-
making processes



Equity and inclusivity

Fair and impartial
decisions, promoting
diversity

CoP Guidance Modules



Volume measure

January 2025



Output selection

Spring/Summer 2025

CoP Submission and Approval

- **Submission Window Deadlines:**

- 1 August 2025: aiming for approved CoPs by November 2025
- 3 October 2025: aiming for approved CoPs by January 2026
- 5 December 2025: aiming for approved CoPs by March 2026
- 6 February 2026: aiming for approved CoPs by May 2026

- **Approval Timeline:** Maximum 3 months

Policy Context

- **Key Developments:**

- Volume measure using HESA Staff record
- Breaking the link between individual staff members and submitted outputs
- Introduction of the People, Culture and Environment (PCE) assessment

CoP and PCE

- **Distinct but Complementary:**
 - CoP sets minimum standards for participation
 - PCE extends beyond minimum standards, promoting excellence

Approach to CoP Implementation

- . Extended Submission Window
- . Flexibility in HESA Data
- . Proportionate Approvals
- . Informal Support

Complaints and Investigations

- **Complaints Process:** For non-compliance with CoP
- **Corrective Actions:** For upheld complaints

CoP for the REF 2029 Volume Measure

- **Tests for Inclusion:**

- Significant responsibility for research (SRR)
- Research independence (RI)

CoP Structure

- **Introduction:**
 - Robustness
 - Transparency
 - Equity and Inclusion
- **Policies and Procedures:**
 - Identifying SRR and RI
 - Staff, committees, and training
 - Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Policies and Procedures

- **Identifying Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR)**
- **Identifying Research Independence (RI)**
- **Consultation with Staff:** Using appropriate representation mechanisms

Staff, Committees, and Training

- . **Staff and committees**
- . **Roles and Responsibilities:**
- . **Training on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion**

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

- **Mandatory EIA:**
 - Assessing policies and practices for identifying SRR and RI
 - Analysis and Actions
 - EIA should inform the CoP
- **Publication:** Final EIAs to be published

Feedback and Appeals

- . **Appeal Mechanisms:** Independent and timely
- . **Existing Mechanisms:** Tied into workload allocation and appraisals

Joint Submissions

- **Sharing CoPs: Across collaborating institutions**
- **Maintaining Adherence: To each institution's CoP**

CoP Review

- . **Future Maintenance and Approval:** Information to follow

Thank you and stay in touch

- Use QR code to sign up for **REF updates** straight to your inbox.
- Please visit **get involved** on our website to view current opportunities.
- Email us at **info@ref.ac.uk** if you have any suggestions about how we can improve our guidance for you.

