

Code of Practice Consultation - Summary and Response

A draft of the SHU *Code of Practice (CoP) for the Preparation of the Research Excellence Framework 2021 Submission* was communicated to all Category A Eligible staff on 5 March 2019. Staff were invited to comment and feedback on the draft CoP, as part of the consultation process, via an online survey - which was open from that point until 1 April. Four staff consultation events were also held between 11-14 March. These were attended by more than 70 staff and Appendix 1 sets out the main areas of discussions at these events. Awareness-raising also took place through faculty, unit of assessment and other local channels - through both supplementary communications and meetings - extending it to a wider group, including relevant support staff. Formal engagement also occurred with the University Leadership Team, Creating Knowledge Board, and Information and Consultation Committee.

The following summarises the feedback provided through both the survey and events. Responses are given where possible to both general and specific points. Throughout the document, responses and clarifications by the CoP working group are marked in blue italicised text.

While it is the intention to be as responsive as possible with regard to the feedback, some issues raised are out of scope of this consultation. This generally relates to areas where specific issues are either mandated by Research England, so the University has no volition over them, or where they relate to wider University matters that REF management cannot influence, for example resourcing and teaching allocation in response to local priorities. The latter of these should be raised through established line management, Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR&OD), or staff representative body mechanisms.

Summary

- The principles of the draft CoP were generally welcomed and the approach was positively received
- There are some concerns/need for clarity about operationalising, particularly in terms of ensuring fairness in application

Communication of the Code of Practice

Q1. Is the approach to communications regarding the Code of Practice (section 1.5) clear?

Q2. Would you suggest any alternative or additional communications methods?

- The proposed approach to communicating the Code of Practice, involving emails to all Category A Eligible Staff, plus hardcopies sent to the home address of absent staff, was widely approved of. *Efforts will also be made to follow-up central communications from the Research and Innovation Office with reinforcement from local research leads*

Significant Responsibility for Research

Q3. Is the categorisation of significant responsibility for research (section 7.1) clear?

Q4. Is there anything/any group that has not been considered with regard to significant responsibility for research?

- Generally the approach to identifying staff with significant responsibility for research was supported

- The timeframe relating to agreement of research plans was raised as a concern - some staff will not routinely have Performance and Development Reviews (PDRs) between now and July. It was also queried if they should happen before the CoP is finalised. *The principles of the CoP have been agreed by ULT, so operationalising and provisional allocation of research time can happen in parallel with the process for final agreement of the CoP. Most areas of the University already have processes in place which align to with the principles, even though they may be called different things (e.g. additional RSA time/REF writing time etc.). Review of research plans can happen separately from full PDRs (i.e. between now and July) until the process is embedded/fully aligned*
- Comments were made that research plans are not currently always a part of PDRs and research leads are not currently part of this process. *Operationalising the CoP will be a major focus across the research community through spring and early summer 2019 and involving research leads in the approval of research plans will inform the PDR process*
- There was some confusion about when the 20.8% threshold for academic staff needs to apply. *Significant Responsibility for Research (SRfR) will be determined for staff to whom it applies on the census date of 31 July 2020 only. Historic or averaged data cannot be used for REF 2021 - this is mandated by Research England. A first determining of status will happen by the end of July 2019, and then this will reoccur annually to REF 2021 and into the next REF period. This will be made more explicit in the final CoP*
- Some individuals had SRfR concerns relating to specific roles (professors, readers, those in senior management roles who are not professors, those working in knowledge exchange (KE), early-career researchers (ECRs), associate lecturers (ALs), doctoral researchers, staff in professional service directorates, doctoral supervisors)
 - *SSG Professors are not contractually work planned (teaching activity however is usually planned), but local practice may agree a nominal research allowance (typically equivalent to the standard RSA, plus an additional 20-30%). The normal approach to time allocation for readers is 30% (RSA plus an additional 20%, as per the University guidance on Reader time allocation). In both cases it is a recommendation of the CoP working group that a minimum of 10% of that additional time should be protected for personal research, as opposed to research leadership*
 - *Note that where percentages of time are quoted, they are (as stated in the draft CoP) a percentage of the total hours for 1 FTE (1576 hours). This was an area of confusion which was evident in some of the survey responses and in discussions at the staff events - i.e. where a reader has ~18% time allocated (which would be equivalent to 20% of 1406 hours); it should be 20% of 1576 hours*
 - *Senior managers would fall under the atypical staff category, so their specific circumstances can be considered on a case-by-case basis. However the fundamental principle (mandated by Research England) is that identification of SRfR is to be based on inputs (i.e. forward-looking time allocation and research objectives), rather than evidence of past capability*
 - *For those working in KE, a combination of research time and academic development time should provide flexibility to support KE work. The important consideration is that the balance between the two allocations is agreed appropriately for that particular individual at their annual PDR, with sign-off by a Head of Research Centre/Institute/Department and with Assistant Dean Research and Innovation (ADRI) oversight*
 - *ECRs are treated the same as all other staff and decisions to allocate time should be based on their future plans*

- *ALs and doctoral researchers are not Category A Eligible staff, as per the REF definitions, and are not in the scope of the REF (fixed by Research England)*
- *It is not anticipated that staff in directorates will be set the research objectives/time to be determined to have SRfR. However, for those who are Category A Eligible, the atypical staff route will provide flexibility to make exceptions where appropriate*
- *Doctoral supervision is classified as a teaching activity (with associated Scheduled Teaching Duties [STD] and Teaching Related Duties [TRD] time allocations), and should not directly relate to the time and objectives set to undertake independent research (research time)*
- *It was felt that the issue of staff undertaking doctorates and how this affected their status with regard to SRfR needed clarifying. Staff doctorates are considered as academic development. This is akin to conducting scholarship, knowledge exchange work and/or developing innovative teaching or professional practice. This does not count towards SRfR. Staff who have recently completed doctorates may also have additional time classified as academic development, where they are further developing their skills and track record in research*
- *Staff undertaking doctorates may however still have SRfR status, where they have ≥10% additional research time allocated for research against specific research plans, which are separate and additional to any academic development time allocated*

Research Independence

Q5. Is the categorisation of research independence (section 8.1) clear?

Q6. Are there any other considerations with regard to research independence?

- *The issue of research independence and academic staff (as opposed to research staff) raised queries, specifically could/would they be assessed against this criteria? The research independence criteria is designed to be applied to staff on research-only contracts. All research-only staff have significant research time and objectives, but those at grade 6 and (with exceptions) grade 7 will tend to be supervised and work on another individual's work programme, so therefore will not be identified as independent researchers*
- *Staff on 'teaching and research' contracts are automatically considered to be independent, where they are identified as having significant responsibility for research. Hence, in the case of academic staff, SRfR incorporates research independence, and is used as the criteria to identify the submission status*
- *The last paragraph of section 8.1 will be deleted in the final version to remove confusion about this issue*

Communications on Status

Q7. Is the approach to communications on status (section 4.1) clear?

Q8. Are there alternative or additional ways we can communicate about status?

- *There was general approval of the approach to communications on status, which involved a central communication and local follow-up conversations, with a few minor areas of clarification requested. Efforts will be made to restate the importance of the one-to-one conversations, and additional clarification on this will be added to the final CoP*

Appeals

Q9. Is the appeals process (sections 5.2 and 5.3) clear and transparent?

Q10. Are there alternatives to the centralised appeals process that you feel should be considered?

- There was general approval of the proposed centralised appeals process, although there were concerns raised that the appeals window opens in August. *The opportunity for staff to submit an appeal will open on 1 August, but will run for 10 weeks in total, to 11 October - with a reminder of the process sent to staff at the start of Semester 1. Furthermore, in response to a suggestion of holding drop-in session for staff to get informal advice on the process, these sessions will be put in place throughout the appeals window*

Output Selection

Q11. Is the output selection process (section 9.1) clear?

Q12. Are there any additional aspects in regard to output selection that you feel should be considered?

- There was general agreement with the proposed process, but with some queries about the purpose of staff circumstance declarations. *The requirement to consider staff circumstances for reductions in outputs required was initially replaced in the original proposals for REF2021 by reducing output targets from 4 per person to 2.5 per FTE, and introducing the range of 1-5 outputs. However the requirement was reintroduced by Research England in the final guidance (January 2019). The University is consequently required to undertake this process, with any reductions applying to the UoA corpus as a whole, as explained in the worked example used at the staff consultations (included in the consultation presentation available on the CK Hub)*
- Outputs connected to staff undertaking doctorates was raised as an area of concern at two of the staff consultation events. *The REF guidance states that: "theses, dissertations or other items submitted for a research degree including doctoral theses may not be listed. Other assessable published items based on research carried out for a research degree may be listed". RIO subsequently contacted Research England for clarification and they confirmed that outputs from both the PhD by Publication and Article-Based PhD routes at SHU can be included in the University's submission, as can outputs published separate from the PhD thesis. It is only theses or dissertations themselves which cannot be submitted*

Staff Circumstances

Q13. Is the centralised process for considering staff circumstances (section 9.1) appropriate - does it facilitate the confidential disclosure of circumstances? If not, what would you suggest as an alternative?

- There was general agreement on the process

Staff made Redundant

Q14. Are the approaches to consideration of outputs from former staff made redundant (section 9.1) clear and transparent?

- There was wide agreement on the proposals as set-out

Overall View

Q15. What is your overall view of the Code of Practice?

- General comments about the CoP were very positive, and all points raised have been noted. *One suggestion - the possible model of research committees advising on SRfR decisions, in addition to (or instead of) local research leads - can be considered at faculty level and as part of the implementation*

Other Comments

Q16. Do you have any other specific comments on the Code of Practice?

- One response raised the lack of attention to impact case studies and allocation of time to support those in the CoP. *Annual PDR meetings should look at research holistically, very much including impact activities. In Appendix 3, impact is listed as one of the four core areas to set research objectives against*

Next Steps

Amendments will be made to the CoP in response to this feedback. Final University sign-off will then be sought and the Code will be submitted to Research England before 7 June. The final version will be made available to all staff and externally via the external website. All Category A Eligible staff will be sent the final version when it has been approved by Research England (expected between August and November 2019).

Appendix 1 - Consultation Sessions - Discussion Points

11 March - UoAs 27, 28, 32 and 34 (English, History, Art & Design, Communications)

- Is the 20.8% threshold at the census date or can it be historical/retrospective? *Can only be at the census date on 31 July 2020 (Research England mandated)*
- RSA objectives for SRfR staff - do they have to be on research too? *It would be expected that RSA time in combination with the ≥10% research time would be utilised to address the agreed research plans. However, this will be on a case-by-case basis, with the important step being agreement of a research plan which would correlate to the allocation of the ≥10% research time*
- Can those doing staff doctorates also be independent? *Yes, if they have separate additional research allocation ≥10%, with associated staff research objectives (hence meeting the SRfR criteria). We will remove the last paragraph of section 8.1 to avoid confusion about this point on independence*
- What does 'agreed' mean in the context of PDR/work planning? Is it being recorded in work planning system enough for audit? *Individual staff should agree their research plan with their line manager and the local research lead (or via a research committee, depending on local practice). This will then inform the work planning and forms an auditable basis for the time allocation, in accordance with guidance from Research England that the process should be forward-looking*
- Reinforce importance of it not being the subject group lead only making decisions. *As above, this is an important aspect of the approach*
- Can staff on fixed-term contract be included? *Staff who meet the REF eligibility criteria and have significant responsibility for research on the staff census date (31 July 2020) will be included in the submission irrespective of whether they hold a fixed-term or permanent contract*
- Should only staff going into REF be given ≥10% additional research time? *Staff should be considered for the allocation of research time against forward looking research plans, and not based on the perception of who may be included in REF. Those Category A staff who meet the SRfR criteria will be submitted to the REF*
- Work planners are agreeing time allocations now and this is at odds with the proposed timeline for approval of the draft CoP. *We will not know whether our draft CoP has been approved by the University until after April. It is suggested that any agreed research time allocations are provisional at this stage, subject to final agreement of the CoP. Many areas already implement a forward-looking research plan based approach to research time allocation, which consequently forms a basis for provisional allocations*

12 March - UoAs 3, 4, 20 and 24 (Health, Psychology, Social Policy, Sport)

- Concerns about ALs and casualisation. *ALs are not Category A Eligible, so are out of scope*
- Can PhD students be included? *PhD students are not Category A Eligible and so are out of scope*
- Staff doctoral researchers and independence. *If they have separate additional research allocation ≥10%, with associated staff research objectives, they will meet the SRfR criteria, and therefore be independent*
- Can the outputs of staff undertaking PhDs be included in the submission? *If staff meet all the eligibility criteria to be deemed Category A submitted staff, their outputs can be included.*
- Status decisions - reinforce importance of involving research leads and potentially UoA Co-ordinators too. *Individual staff should agree their research plan with their line manager and the local research lead (or via a research committee, depending on local practice).*

- When will status communications be sent? *By the end of July 2019*
- Timing around work planning (now) and confirmation of CoP (June-August) is challenging. *Noted and agreed, but unfortunately it is unavoidable that they have to happen in parallel. Decisions now should be provisional, subject to confirmation of the CoP*
- Will the University consider staff who have left the University? *Former staff will not contribute to the FTE on the staff census date but their outputs may be considered as part of the corpus of the UoA, as long as the outputs were produced at SHU. However, if staff have left the University as a result of being made redundant, their outputs will not be considered. There are some exceptions to this where outputs have been co-produced with current SHU staff and these outputs may appear in the corpus (as per section 9.1 of the Draft CoP)*
- Will panels receive a histogram of the number of outputs against staff? *As part of the standard analyses provided to panels (see Annex J of the REF Guidance on Submissions), we will include data on the distribution of outputs attributed to staff in submissions. There will be an opportunity in the unit-level environment template (REF5b) for institutions to contextualise the distribution of outputs, drawing on the processes described in the CoP*
- Concern about 2* outputs being an objective in Appendix 2 - staff with SRfR should not be aiming to produce unfunded outputs. *This is referencing the University's Academic Careers Framework, where indicators linked to outputs are grade-specific. The grade 7 indicator is "some evidence of producing internationally recognised (2*) research outputs and a progression strategy for developing internationally excellent (3*) outputs". Staff above grade 7 should be aiming to produce outputs at 3* and 4**

13 March - UoAs 13, 17 and 23 (Planning, Business, Education)

- The situation of those who have historically only had RSA, but who have produced outputs. *SRfR is not retrospective, and individuals can use those outputs to evidence their capability in presenting research plans for this year, which will be the basis for determining SRfR*
- Need a centralised approach to SRfR for consistency - common template for research plan submission and UoA Co-ordinator/research committee oversight. *The aim is indeed to move towards a more consistent approach. This may involve aligning existing local practices to CoP principles as a minimum for this first year*
- The term Co-I is not used in contract research. *Will include equivalent terminology in the final version of the CoP*
- Timing concerns - PDRs in July (i.e. too late). *Suggestion to look at research plans separately and sooner - which can then be used to inform the PDR*

14 March - UoAs 5, 11 and 12 (Bioscience, Computing, Engineering)

- Problem of staff supported historically, but research time recently withdrawn due to cut backs. *Use of the census date, rather than looking retrospective, is fixed by Research England*
- Significant sabbaticals have recently been granted, but for early career staff where the intention was not to give them SRfR. *Need to ensure that any time allocation is coded against academic development and/or research as appropriate, and where research time is against specific agreed research plans. Hence development time should be distinct from research time*
- The case of Readers who are not producing outputs. *This will need to be looked at through local faculty activities to ensure that staff are clear on their research objectives*
- Hard to separate out KE time from research time as these activities can blur. *Agreed, hence the requirement for input from local research lead to clarify the research objectives of an individual plan*

- Understaffing - staff in department all already work planned at more than 100%. *Individual work plan issues are outside the scope of the CoP. However the ULT has approved the principle that those with agreed research plans will receive at least 10% additional research allocation, and this is to be implemented locally, with oversight by the Faculty ADRIs. Staff who feel that the University held data does not accurately reflect their SRfR status can appeal, as per section 5 of the draft CoP*
- Should research plans be for 12 months? *A specific research plan for the next 12 months is required in order to allocate research time, but this will ideally be part of a longer-term research and development strategy*
- Will staff who have been designated as having significant responsibility for research, but who have no research outputs, still be included in the submission? *Yes, inclusion is based on meeting the criteria for SRfR, hence is linked to the time and resources given to undertake independent research and where this is an expectation of the role and not on the production of outputs. In such an instance, the individual would be returned with an unclassified output*