Equality Impact Assessment for REF2021

30th July 2021
Equality Impact Assessment for REF2021 – Final Post Submission

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Introduction

This equality impact assessment (EIA) considers the procedures for identifying staff with significant responsibility for research, determining research independence and selecting outputs for the REF2021 (Research Excellence Framework) set by the UWS REF2021 Code of Practice.

Purpose

The purpose of this EIA is to ensure that the procedures, practices and decisions made in relation to REF2021, as outlined in the UWS Code of Practice, were fair, met the needs of staff, did not inadvertently discriminate against any protected group and advanced equality, particularly in relation to the protected characteristics groups identified in REF 2014, namely age, disability, sex and ethnicity. In addition, the funding bodies require all institutions to conduct an EIA on their procedures for identifying staff with significant responsibility for research (where applicable), determining research independence and for selecting outputs for the REF.

Who is responsible for the EIA?

The UWS REF Strategy Group, chaired by the Vice Principal for Research, Innovation and Engagement is responsible for this EIA. The membership of the REF Strategy Group includes: Vice-Principal Research, Innovation & Engagement (RIE), Dean or their nominated representatives from Academic Schools, Head of Enterprise (representing Enterprise & Employer Engagement team), Head of Research (representing Research Services team), Library representative, Equality & Organisational Development Consultant (representing People & Organisational Development department), representatives from Marketing, ITDS and Trade Unions.

This EIA was approved for submission by the REF Strategy Group on 9th July 2021.

Background

The following procedures were put in place to mitigate against any negative impacts on staff with protected characteristics and to advance equality of opportunities. These were reviewed in collaboration with the UOA leads and co-leads at regular intervals pre-submission. Adjustments were made where required.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Committee

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Committee is responsible for supporting the strategic direction and monitoring inclusivity in the University. The EDI Committee ensures inclusivity policies and practices are being managed and implemented effectively at all levels of the University. The EDI Committee, which includes representations from students, all Schools and Unions, reviewed the UWS Code of Practice at various stages of the drafting.

Equality and diversity training

In addition to mandatory unconscious bias training, all support staff with an active role in the REF2021 submission and staff with a leadership role relating to the REF submission were required to attend a bespoke, compulsory REF2021 equality and diversity workshop designed by Research Services in association with the UWS EDI Adviser. The bespoke, mandatory training on unconscious bias and EDI, attended by all staff involved in the REF preparations, aimed at promoting understanding between staff sharing a protected characteristic and staff who do not. A positive environment fostering communication, collaboration, understanding and tolerance was built and maintained around all REF processes. Individual circumstances related to protected characteristics were accounted for throughout the process and adjustments were made to accommodate needs.

UWS REF2021 Code of Practice Equality Impact Assessment
The Code of Practice underwent an EIA in 2019, which ensured equality was fully considered at every stage of the processes for determining significant responsibility for research (SRR), research independence and output selection.

Communication

The UWS REF Code of Practice was available in its draft form on the intranet for all staff to review it and feedback. This document and information on the process for disclosing individual circumstances were widely circulated to all staff via REF newsletters (every 3 months) and email communications as per the timetable within the UWS Code of Practice. At a local level, UOA leads and co-leads worked to ensure the dissemination of relevant information to all academic staff and support staff throughout the REF preparations. Awareness of equality and diversity issues was vastly improved during and thanks to the REF2021 preparations, through the circulation of the Code of Practice, the process for declaring individual circumstances and the University’s initiatives which ran in parallel, such as the preparations for progressing equality outcomes and mainstreaming actions.

Support

Support networks available to staff requiring advice on REF2021 included: REF Central Team; Individual Circumstances Group; UOA Leads; REF Appeals Panel; School Administrators.

At institutional level, the setting up of Academic Life, a fully integrated and co-located unit to support all academic activities, has been instrumental in developing and offering career-enriching opportunities to engage in research, access internal funds and receive support for submission of funding applications. Research and Business Innovation teams within Academic Life have since REF2014 developed numerous support mechanisms targeting under-represented groups, as defined by the Equality Act, within the University. These include PROPEL, Grant Accelerator, REF Accelerator, UWS CRUCIBLE, Masterclasses to name but a few.

Significant responsibility for research

To ensure the process was fair, we implemented an appeal process and a procedure for staff to proactively declare their individual circumstances. Through multiple communication channels, including direct email and REF newsletters, staff who were initially determined not to have SRR were encouraged to appeal, to maximise their inclusion in the REF submission. In total, 40 appeals were received and considered in relation to the determination of SRR. This compares to 2 appeals during the REF2014 submission process. 3 of these appeals included sensitive information relating to EDI characteristics, therefore were assessed by the dedicated members of the Panel, the Head of HR Operations and a member of the Individual Circumstances Group, and were not shared with the other panel members.

Research independence

All the information submitted through the survey was subject to two rounds of verification and addressed in all cases where staff indication of research independence contradicted the evidence available to the Central REF Team. This was to ensure that no member of staff was negatively affected by any potential variances in the interpretation of the definition of research independence according to the Code of Practice.

Selection of outputs

To ensure fairness, inclusivity and transparency, the output selection process was managed using the University’s research management system (PURE). This enabled Category A eligible staff with significant responsibility for research to propose their top 5 outputs for consideration and inclusion (and more than 5 if they so desired). In addition, the UOAs led a double peer-review process to reduce the risks of unconscious bias affecting the selection and to maximise the quality of the outputs.
submitted. Gender balance was taken into account when choosing the reviewers. Advice from external assessors was also sought as appropriate. UOA leads referred to the specific panel criteria set out in the REF guidance to shape the final selection accordingly. Citation data was used to inform the output assessment, in line with the advice received from the UK Forum for Responsible Research Metrics. The University’s commitment to endorse and promote responsible use of metrics is proved by the signing of DORA (Declaration on Research Assessment).

Staff were invited to submit appeals on the grounds of output selection and a total of 6 appeals were received on this ground. In general, we aimed at building and implementing processes that were as inclusive as possible.

Progress since REF2014
Listed below are the action plan items included in the EIA for REF2014 and an outline of the measures taken to address them:

- “Encourage staff disability disclosure through changes to HR i-Trent system and internal communication”. To improve UWS diversity disclosure a Data Matters campaign was launched, to explain why the range of questions, all related to protected characteristics, were asked and how we stored and used this information. Staff were encouraged to access their data and check that all was up-to-date. The results were positive, as the non-disclosure rates related to some protected characteristics decreased within 6 months of the launch. Furthermore, equality data fields in iTrent were updated to reflect current guidance and make easier for staff to update their sensitive data. This helped increasing sensitive data available. In addition, the iTrent system was further developed to ensure staff could update their data out with the university building so were able to update from home laptops and mobile devices.

- “The Innovation and Research Office will continue to provide staff development tailored for Early Career Researchers”. UWS’ approach to supporting Early Career Researchers (ECR) includes: (1) ensuring ECR representation on main research committees; (2) establishing and funding an Early Career Researchers’ Forum in 2018 (150 members, hosting regular events throughout the year); (3) dedicated professional development opportunities (e.g., UWS CRUCIBLE, organised during the pandemic virtually) and (4) requiring ECR involvement as standard for all UWS-supported research projects.

- “The UWS Athena Swan self-assessment team to promote research careers to women in SET areas”. The university’s approach to gender equality had been further developed to align the work of the Athena Swan Assessment team, Gender Action Plan Group and Equally Safe in Higher Education group to take an integrated and aligned approach to progress gender equality. Several steps have been taken with respect to gender balance: development of a Women’s Staff Network (UWS HiGHER) an appointment of a Senior Gender Champion; development of a Women’s Leadership and Development Programme.

Institutional initiatives to promote EDI
Examples of institutional initiatives targeted to support individual categories are:

- **Returners’ scheme**: this scheme allows access to funding of up to £10k for staff who are off work due to pregnancy and maternity or long term illness to support them in their research career.

- **Carer’s Fund**: allows staff to access funds to enable them to cover the childcare or caring costs of attending staff development conferences. This is to ensure those with caring responsibilities are supported and have similar opportunities to their peers who do not have caring responsibilities.

- **Flexible working and Dependents Leave**: UWS offers a range of flexible working patterns
to suit individual circumstances and business need. In addition, we offer Dependents Leave for any staff members who require to take time off to look after their dependants.

A summary of the endeavours the University has recently undertaken to promote EDI is provided below:

- The University has further demonstrated its commitment to equality and diversity through attainment of: (1) Athena SWAN Bronze award; (2) HR Excellence in Research award (3) Disability Confident Accreditation (4) Stonewall Diversity Champions Scheme.
- UWS Strategy 2025 has set the vision of the institution to be among the global leaders of excellent, relevant and purposeful research aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). Achieving gender equality and reducing inequalities are among the UN SDGs. The University is committed to respect the equal rights of all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion, following the UN EDI principles.
- The institution’s commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion is reflected in the changes made during 2020-2021 to the EDI Leadership and Governance Arrangements, including: the appointment of Senior Allies across a range of protected characteristics, to ensure that priority areas such as sex, gender reassignment, disability, sexual orientation and ethnicity were being championed at a senior level; the development of an Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Wellbeing Co-ordination group to ensure that we considered wellbeing in relation to EDI. In addition, a new EDI Champions Forum has been developed with representation from professional services, academic schools and students.
- In 2020, a review of the EIA guidelines and procedure was carried out, which resulted in a refreshed EIA process and toolkit. It is anticipated that the new approach with detailed guidance and the EIA template in a single toolkit will give staff the tools and confidence to complete EIAs and thus advance equality for all protected characteristics.
Scope

The University was required by the Scottish Funding Council to develop, document and apply a Code of Practice on the fair and transparent processes for determining staff with significant responsibility for research, who is an independent researcher and for the selection of outputs, including a process to support staff with individual circumstances. The purpose of this document was to aid the University in its responsibility in respect of promoting equality and diversity, complying with legislation, REF2021 guidance on submissions and related documents, when preparing the submission to REF2021. The Code of Practice should be read in conjunction with the University’s Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Code - [https://www.uws.ac.uk/media/7187/uws-edihr-code-april-2021.pdf](https://www.uws.ac.uk/media/7187/uws-edihr-code-april-2021.pdf) - and it can be found at: [https://www.uws.ac.uk/media/7610/uws_ref2021_code_of_practice_final.pdf](https://www.uws.ac.uk/media/7610/uws_ref2021_code_of_practice_final.pdf) and on the REF2021 official website at [https://www.ref.ac.uk/about/equality-and-diversity/institutions-codes-of-practice/](https://www.ref.ac.uk/about/equality-and-diversity/institutions-codes-of-practice/). Embedded in the Code of Practice are procedures for determination of staff eligibility, independence and significant responsibility for research, selection of outputs and selection of impact case studies.

Which protected characteristics have been considered?

The relevance to and impact upon each equality group with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, ethnicity, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation) was considered.

An equality impact assessment for the REF2014 exercise highlighted the potential for negative impact on active researchers in all the groups protected by equalities legislation. In particular, differences in selection rates by sex, ethnicity, age and disability status were found. We have focused on these protected characteristics when gathering data for our analysis. Lack of data on other characteristics, such as gender reassignment, limited the scope of our analysis. The assessment is supported by a range of measures taken to identify the effect on the selection of staff with significant responsibility for research, the determination of research independence and the output selection.

Who is potentially affected?

This EIA considers all eligible Category A staff to be in scope. In addition, consideration has been given to Category B staff in relation to output selection. All the groups protected by equalities legislation were considered as being potentially affected. It should be noted that the scope was limited by the available information on protected characteristics held by the University.

Stages involved

Prior to approval by the UWS Senate, the REF Code of Practice was developed in consultation with:

- REF Strategy Group
- REF2021 Code of Practice Sub-Group
- Research & Enterprise Advisory Committee (REAC)
- REF Unit of Assessment Panels
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Committee
- All staff via UWS Intranet

The process for determining who had significant responsibility for research was designed to be open and transparent. To reduce the risk of unconscious bias an appeal process was built into the Code of Practice procedures.

During the initial consultation process, staff mentioned that they wanted clearer guidance within the Code of Practice and training on understanding how the number of outputs for part time staff is calculated. In response, frequently asked questions were addressed and communicated to all academic staff via a series of REF newsletters.
It was also recognised that the REF Strategy Group and Unit of Assessment (UOA) panels were limited in diversity and therefore measures needed to be introduced to reduce the risk of bias in the decision making process.

In response, the following measures were taken as the UWS REF Code of Practice was implemented:

1. An initial EIA on the draft Code of Practice was undertaken by the University’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Committee on 21 May 2019.
2. EDI training was provided to all key staff with leadership roles, as identified in the Code of Practice.
3. Gender balance was a consideration in appointing the REF Appeal Panel members, as well as internal and external reviewers of research outputs and impact case studies.
4. An initial EIA analysis was made on staff identified with SRR, in advance of the survey of submission of intentions in December 2019, showing that UWS were on course to submit a higher proportion of staff, which reached a 129% increase compared to REF2014 with the final submission.
5. An EIA questionnaire relating to the output selection process was issued to UOA leads in January 2020. This was revisited in January 2021.
6. A second EIA analysis was carried out in November 2020.
7. During the period April-July 2021 this final EIA was undertaken.
Analyses

The EIA analysed the data related to employees with the protected characteristics of age, disability, ethnicity and sex in being included in the REF.

The following analysis has been carried out, as per the Code of Practice:

- Analysis of Significant Responsibility for Research data
- Analysis of Early Career Researchers
- Analysis of protected characteristics of staff in relation to selection of outputs

Where the analysis has shown figures n<5, numbers have been omitted, to protect anonymity.

Analysis of Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR)

The Code of Practice set out the criteria for determining significant responsibility for research. UWS submitted 279 staff to REF2021, from a population of 561 eligible staff. This represents 49.7% staff submitted to REF2021 in comparison to REF2014, where 21.6% of academic staff were submitted.

![Comparison of eligible and submitted staff for REF2014 and REF2021](image)

*Figure 1: Comparison of eligible and submitted staff for REF2014 and REF2021*

The SRR analysis has considered the Cat A eligible staff population, the Cat A submitted staff population and the early career researcher (ECR) population, as subset.

### Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cat A eligible staff</th>
<th>Cat A submitted staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34 and under</td>
<td>35-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: breakdown of all Category A eligible staff (as per REF2021 definition at paragraph 117 of the Guidance on submissions) and of submitted staff by age.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eligible ECRs</th>
<th>Submitted ECRs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34 and under</td>
<td>34 and under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-49</td>
<td>35-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 and over</td>
<td>50 and over</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Age Group    | Eligible ECRs | Submitted ECRs |
|--------------|---------------|
| 34 and under | 27            | 16             |
| 35-49        | 57            | 32             |
| 50 and over  | 15            | <5             |
|              | 27.3%         | 31.4%          |
|              | 57.6%         | 62.7%          |
|              | 15.1%         | 5.9%           |

Table 2: breakdown of Cat A eligible staff who qualified as ECR (as per REF2021 definition at paragraph 148 of the Guidance on submissions) by age.

Figure 2: Comparison of submitted staff by age for REF2014 and REF2021

- The data on age distribution of submitted staff shows that the highest percentage of staff falls within the 35-49 group, as in REF2014.
- It is unsurprising that the majority of ECRs falls into the lower age categories.

Risk 1: younger researchers may be less experienced and have had fewer opportunities to lead on research projects and supervise PhD students.

Prevention 1: eligible staff were required to meet at least one of the SRR criteria set out by the UWS REF Code of Practice. For staff who had not been Principal Investigators (PI) on a research project or lead supervisors for PhD students, we looked at the time allocated for research on their Activity plan AND/OR MyContribution form. At institutional level, initiatives such as the UWS CRUCIBLE, an innovative future leaders program aimed at helping ECRs see the bigger picture as they develop their research through innovation, collaboration and impact. Additionally teams applying for competitive UWS studentships must include an ECR to address this risk.

Risk 2: younger researchers may have only recently concluded their doctoral studies and have had shorter time to produce eligible research outputs.

Prevention 2: the decoupling of staff and outputs implemented in REF2021, alongside with the opportunity for ECRs to apply for a unit reduction AND/OR a reduction to the minimum of one (output) where equality-related circumstances occurred, minimised the risk of a negative impact on younger researchers. We ensured that all staff were aware of these support processes through communication and liaison with the UOA leads.
Table 3: breakdown of all Category A eligible staff and of submitted staff by disability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eligible ECRs</th>
<th>Submitted ECRs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: breakdown of Cat A eligible and submitted staff who qualified as ECR by disability.

Comparison of submitted staff by disability for REF2014 and REF2021

- 5.7% of staff included in the submission has declared disabilities, against 7.3% of the eligible population. Disclosure percentages are much higher among the ECR population.
- Comparing the disability numbers to the data for REF2014 is not feasible, as the number of staff declaring disability was n<5. However, the number of “unknown” has clearly decreased in REF2021 compared to REF2014.

Risk 1: an individual may have not been able to carry out research at a comparable rate to their colleagues due to a disability and having needed periods of absence from work, including when caring for a disabled relative.

Prevention 1: the decoupling of staff and outputs implemented in REF2021, alongside with the opportunity for all staff to apply for a unit reduction AND/OR a reduction to the minimum of one (output) where equality-related circumstances occurred, minimised the risk of a negative impact/inadvertent discrimination on staff with disabilities. We ensured that all staff were aware of these support processes through communication and liaison with the UOA leads.
Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cat A eligible staff</th>
<th>Cat A submitted staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Ethnic minorities*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic minorities*</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: breakdown of all Category A eligible staff by ethnicity.

*For the purpose of this report, the category “Ethnic minorities” includes the following groups: Asian, Black, Chinese and mixed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eligible ECRs</th>
<th>Submitted ECRs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Ethnic minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79.8%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: breakdown of Cat A eligible staff and submitted staff who qualified as ECR by ethnicity.

Figure 4: Comparison of submitted staff by ethnicity for REF2014 and REF2021

- The percentage of submitted staff from white ethnic background has increased from 61.5% in REF2014 to 78.9% in REF2021. The percentage of submitted staff from ethnic minorities has slightly increased overall.
- Proportionally more staff from ethnic minorities were determined to have SRR than the general population.

Risk 1: Unconscious bias may have negatively influenced the selection of outputs produced by staff from ethnic minorities background.

Prevention 1: a double peer-review process was implemented to inform the outputs assessment and selection. The output selection was primarily driven by the need of meeting the REF guidance requirements and assessment criteria, specific panel criteria and by quality assessment. All UOAs were required to submit a form to outline how the output selection process was managed and how EDI
(equality, diversity and inclusion) issues were taken into account. Reviewers from a diverse backgrounds were invited to take part in the assessment process.

Risk 2: Staff joining UWS from outside the UK may have not been aware of the REF requirements and there may have been linguistic barriers hindering their understanding.

Prevention 2: all eligible staff were contacted by the REF Central Team and offered support and advice. The Code of Practice was published on the intranet and information on the REF preparations were regularly and widely circulated through the REF newsletter.

Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cat A eligible staff</th>
<th>Cat A submitted staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>282</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.3%</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: breakdown of Category A eligible and submitted staff by sex.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eligible ECRs</th>
<th>Submitted ECRs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: breakdown of Cat A eligible and submitted staff who qualified as ECR by sex.

Comparison of submitted staff by sex for REF2014 and REF2021

- The percentage of female staff submitted has risen from 28.7% in REF2014 to 40.9% in REF2021. This is encouraging; however, we have yet to achieve parity, with more male staff submitted than female staff.
- The gender balance has nearly been achieved in terms of submission of ECRs, with 51% of submitted staff being female and 49% male.

Risk 1: female staff may be treated less favourably than male staff in relation to output selection.
**Prevention 1**: our output review process took into account gender balance, including in those male-dominated disciplines, such as STEM subjects, to minimise the risk of sex discrimination and unconscious bias.

**Analysis of staff in relation to selection of outputs**

In REF2021 staff and output selection were decoupled for the first time. Output selection was achieved on the basis of the minimum of one and maximum of 5, plus additional guidance on submissions to ensure that for each UOA the number of outputs submitted was equal to the FTE of the UOA’s submitted staff multiplied by 2.5. Significant efforts were made to communicate well, widely and fairly, and to treat all individuals with respect. The University’s aim was to make the staff assessment and output selection processes as positive as possible for all concerned.

The analysis on selection of outputs has considered the Cat A eligible staff population, the Cat A submitted staff population, the Cat B (former staff) submitted population and the early career researcher (ECR) population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>34 and under</th>
<th>35-49</th>
<th>50 and over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Ethnic minorities</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>386</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>417</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>63.7%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>&lt;5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 9-12: breakdown of the outputs submitted to REF2021 by age, disability, ethnicity and sex based on attributed staff.*

- The comparison between REF2014 and REF2021 data shows an improvement in gender balance. However, Table 7 shows there is still a disparity, which is greater when looking at the outputs attribution data (Table 12).
- In general, the decoupling of staff and outputs implemented in REF2021, alongside with the individual circumstances process, has mitigated the negative impact of the processes on groups with protected characteristics, by reducing the pressure of expectations on research productivity.
Conclusions
Our assessment has not found any significant negative impact on the protected characteristic groups of age and ethnicity. This indicates that the UWS REF2021 Code of Practice has set out fair processes that did not inadvertently discriminate against these protected characteristics. On the contrary, the figures suggest that the processes have contributed to advance equality, as there has been an increase in diversity of submitted staff.

Improvements have been made towards equality for female staff, which reflect the preventative measures put in place. However, some disparity remains and this will be further investigated in the next REF cycle.

The data shows that staff with declared disabilities had a slightly reduced chance of being submitted. Nevertheless, the issue of low-rates of disclosure remains, which is negatively affecting the analysis. Although preventative measures have been put in place, it is very hard to assess the impact of these measures, due to the high rates of non-disclosure.

Overall, the comparison with the data presented in the EIA for REF2014 indicates that the REF2021 Code of Practice and the processes set out by this document have contributed to advancing EDI overall.

The considerable number of appeals and individual circumstances declarations received demonstrate that staff felt empowered by the processes in place to request a revision of the data, which was encouraged by the REF Central Team to ensure data accuracy and fairness, and felt comfortable to disclose their personal circumstances. Through the REF newsletters and email communications, the REF Central Team ensured that all eligible staff members were aware of the opportunity to log an appeal against the initial SRR assessment, the UOA allocation and the output selection. The procedures in place therefore contributed to guaranteeing fairness and transparency.

Action Plan
The action plan, as a living document, will be regularly revised to address emerging issues and changes. Actions planned include:

- UWS Strategy 2025 demonstrates the University’s commitment to the promotion of equality of opportunity for all staff and students and the creation of an inclusive culture which celebrates diversity. A thematic plan is under development in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion that will focus on current equality priorities and specific actions to progress current equality outcomes and mainstreaming work. This will include, but is not limited to, actions to address persistent inequalities in sex, gender reassignment, ethnicity and disability.
- Continue the Data Matters campaign, to encourage staff to provide vital information on protected characteristics that will allow the University to better support them. Although there has been a considerable improvement, there are still significant gaps in the data related to disability, gender reassignment, religion or belief and sexual orientation.
- In general, to assist staff in their work, an EIA Toolkit has been developed and piloted ready for implementation in 2021. A new EIA Group, reporting to the EDI Committee, has been formed, to oversee the new approach to EIA publication. The next steps will focus on further develop staff skills and confidence in completing EIAs.
- Continue to provide unconscious bias and EDI training to all staff involved in the REF exercise.
- Gather feedback from staff on processes in place, especially to understand how these have affected staff with protected characteristics and how these can be improved in the next REF.
• Further peer support from staff networks: BME, Disability Action Network, Women’s HighHER, UWS Liberty (LGBT+).
• Improve equality of opportunities for male and female staff in outputs publishing.
• Provide UOA leads with access to advice and support from EDI champions.
• Raise awareness of the support mechanisms for staff with protected characteristics among all staff, through REF-related communication channels.
• Undertake EIA on all planned research activities prior to commencement, for example, the proposed review of research groupings and the institutional led review of the promotion criteria.

The processes for determining staff with significant responsibility for research, research independence and output selection, will be reviewed to reflect the changes implemented by the updated REF guidance, once published. We will conduct an EIA when the new requirements are in place. In the meantime, we will continue to give staff the opportunity to report any EDI concern and flag any risk of discrimination against protected characteristics our processes may cause, in a safe and confidential way.