

## **Code of Practice template**

**Institution name: Plymouth Marjon University**

**Date of submission: 11<sup>th</sup> May 2026**

## **Part 1: Introduction**

### **Purpose and institutional context**

Plymouth Marjon University places its values of humanity, curiosity, independence and ambition at the centre of its activities, as articulated in the University Strategy, Marjon 2030. These values underpin this Code of Practice, which sets out, in line with REF 2029 guidance, the policies and procedures for the identification of staff with significant responsibility for research, determinations of research independence, and the selection of research outputs for submission.

REF 2029 will be the second REF submission made by Plymouth Marjon University. Building on outcomes from REF 2021 and the development of our research culture since that time, the submission aims to reflect the quality and impact of research that underpins our learning, teaching and engagement with society. A credible REF submission supports the University's strategic ambition to obtain research degree awarding powers and to strengthen research capacity within our established disciplinary areas.

In determining what constitutes a credible submission, and while maintaining an inclusive ethos, Plymouth Marjon University aims for outputs and impact case studies to meet a minimum quality threshold of 2\*. We anticipate submissions to three Units of Assessment (UoAs) aligned to our teaching and research strengths, with approximately one third of academic contracts identified as including significant responsibility for research.

### **Alignment with institutional policies and values**

This Code of Practice is aligned with Plymouth Marjon University's values and its institutional policies on equality, diversity and inclusion, people and culture, responsible research assessment and public and community engagement. The University values research, knowledge exchange and academic leadership alongside excellence in learning and teaching. Staff progression and promotion are available across academic pathways regardless of REF participation. The University's academic contribution framework promotes equality of opportunity and recognises diverse academic activities, with non-hierarchical pathways and transparent criteria for workload allocation and promotion.

### **Supporting the REF principles of robustness, transparency, and equity and inclusion**

#### *Robustness*

Selection processes will be undertaken consistently and centrally in accordance with this Code of Practice. Responsibilities for decision-making and advisory roles are clearly defined and summarised in Annex A. The REF2029 Steering Group is responsible for the operation of REF processes and reports to the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee which offers feedback on progress. Senate receives and approves reports and key decisions through established governance structures. All individuals involved in decision-making or advisory roles will undertake REF-specific equality and diversity training. All data collection and processing will comply with GDPR requirements.

#### *Transparency*

Processes for identifying staff with significant responsibility for research, determining research independence and selecting outputs will be clearly communicated and aligned with REF 2029 guidance. Research pathways are discussed at induction and reviewed through performance and development review processes. This Code of Practice will be published in an accessible format, communicated to all relevant staff (including those on leave or based outside the UK), and made available externally. Briefings will be recorded and archived, and a timetable of REF activities is provided in Annex C.

#### *Equity and inclusion*

This Code of Practice ensures that REF-related decisions are fair, inclusive and impartial. Clear criteria are published (Annex D), and staff are supported to engage with REF processes regardless of background, contract type or career stage. Where practical, staff are invited to provide information about their research role and outputs, which is considered alongside institutional criteria through transparent decision-making processes. In line with our value of humanity, and building on our heritage as an inclusive community, we hold the Investors in People Award, Social Enterprise Mark, Disability Two Ticks and are a Stonewall Diversity Champion. We have recently been awarded an Athena Swan (bronze) and, more importantly, we embed consideration of equality, diversity and

inclusion in all our activities. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is embedded at all key stages to monitor and mitigate potential adverse impacts of REF.

### **Equality Impact Assessment and actions since REF 2021**

The Equality Impact Assessment undertaken as part of REF 2021 identified some inclusion issues around researchers outside of our submitted Units of Assessment (6 staff were included in small unit exemptions). In response, interdisciplinary research groups were established in order to ensure support was available for researchers across diverse disciplines. It also identified potential risks of under-representation for female researchers. Work since the last REF has include a successful submission for an Athena Swan bronze award, engaging female staff with Advance HE's Aurora Women's leadership programme, implementation of writing retreats which are often popular with female staff and appointment of female research professors.

Since REF2021, the university has continued to develop an inclusive research community, supporting PGR students and ECRs, as well as capacity building in research for practitioner academics. Resourcing commitments in this area include a new PGR Hub and the Doctoral College, a commitment to the ESRC South West Doctoral Training Partnership which we joined in 2023, the appointment of research active staff, and introduction of new Academic Director roles in Research and Knowledge Exchange to support research strategy and researcher development. A research mentoring scheme has also been introduced. An updated EIA will be initiated in 2026 (see part 2 below).

### **Commitment to responsible research assessment**

Plymouth Marjon University is committed to responsible research assessment and is a DORA signatory. Research quality is assessed through expert peer review and qualitative judgement, not through publication venue or journal-based metrics. Diverse research outputs and broader contributions to the research ecosystem, including mentoring, open research, policy engagement and public engagement, are recognised and valued.

## **Part 2: Identifying Staff Contracts with Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR)**

Plymouth Marjon University applies a consistent, institution-wide approach to identifying staff contracts that include significant responsibility for research and therefore contribute to the REF2029 volume measure. As a research-informed institution with a strong teaching, community and public-sector focus, the HESA staff record does not, on its own, comprehensively identify all staff whose roles include significant responsibility for research. In particular, a number of academic roles place primary emphasis on learning and teaching, leadership and management, or knowledge exchange and impact, while still engaging with scholarly or research-informed activity. These roles would not ordinarily meet the REF definition of significant responsibility for research.

### **Criteria for Significant Responsibility for Research**

Contracts are identified as having significant responsibility for research where the role includes an explicit expectation to undertake independent research as a substantive and ongoing component of employment. At Plymouth Marjon University, this is evidenced through participation in the research academic pathway, which indicates that the role includes:

- A clear expectation to design, conduct and disseminate independent research;
- Allocated time within the academic contribution model to undertake research activity;
- Responsibility for developing and sustaining a research profile, including outputs that may be eligible for REF;
- Engagement with the wider research environment, which may include funding activity, research mentoring and leadership, collaboration and/or postgraduate research activities, as appropriate to role and career stage.

These criteria are role-based and forward-looking, and do not rely on past performance or output quality.

### **Decision-Making Process and Communication**

The primary mechanism for identifying contracts with significant responsibility for research is the academic pathway framework set out in the Academic Promotion and Career Development Procedure (Annex E). This framework defines four academic pathways (Section 6, Annex E):

- i) learning and teaching;
- ii) research;
- iii) leadership and management; and
- iv) knowledge exchange and impact.

All academic staff are expected to engage across all four pathways, but to demonstrate sustained achievement in at least two for promotion purposes.

At appointment, and through ongoing annual Performance and Development Review (PDR) discussions, academic staff self-select, in discussion with their line manager, the pathways that best reflect their role and intended contribution to the university. Pathway selection is reviewed regularly and may change over time in response to role evolution, institutional strategy, or individual development. There is no expectation that pathway selection is fixed.

Allocation to the research pathway constitutes institutional evidence that the contract includes significant responsibility for research for REF purposes. Staff choosing the research pathway are provided with workload allocation to support independent research, and this expectation forms part of their substantive role. Conversely, staff not allocated to the research pathway are not disadvantaged; all pathways are equally valued, supported through workload allocation, and provide routes to career progression, including promotion to professorial grades.

In a small institution where staff may undertake multiple roles, it is recognised that some staff may be research active - contributing to scholarly communities or professional research - without having significant responsibility for research as defined for REF purposes. This reflects the institution's inclusive academic model and does not represent a judgement on the value or quality of individual contributions. Staff on contracts where the primary academic employment function is research-only will

normally be identified as having significant responsibility for research, subject to REF eligibility rules. However, such staff may not necessarily meet the REF definition of research independence.

The same policies and procedures apply consistently across all Units of Assessment.

### **Staff, Committees, and Training**

Oversight of the identification of contracts with significant responsibility for research is provided through the University's REF governance structure, as summarised in Annex A and described in section 1. Line managers hold initial discussions with staff regarding pathway selection and role expectations. The REF2029 Steering Group provides institutional-level assurance, reviewing the overall profile of staff identified as having significant responsibility for research, including alignment with Units of Assessment and the shape of the institutional submission in relation to strategic aims. The Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee receives regular reports, with ultimate strategic oversight resting with Senate. All individuals involved in advisory or decision-making roles undertake mandatory REF2029-specific equality, diversity and inclusion training, in addition to institutional equality and diversity training.

### **Appeals**

Given the self-selection process outlined above, Plymouth Marjon University anticipate little requirement for an appeals process at this stage. Nonetheless an appeals process to support staff that feel they have selected their pathway incorrectly and/or feel they have been unfairly treated through the process outlined above is available. Staff may appeal decisions relating to their choice of pathway, allocation of contract or outputs to a particular UoA, and concerns around output selection. Appeals must be submitted in writing within a defined timeframe and are considered by individuals not involved in the original decision-making process. Appeals may be made on the grounds of procedural irregularity or the application of criteria, but not on the basis of academic judgement alone. Outcomes are communicated formally. Full details of the appeals process are set out in Annex F.

### **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**

An EIA has been undertaken to compare the characteristics of academic staff identified as having significant responsibility for research with those who are not, in line with the university's commitment to inclusivity and transparency. The assessment considers protected characteristics, early career researcher status, contractual status (fractional or fixed-term), and other relevant factors such as discipline.

A further EIA will be conducted to examine the characteristics of staff whose work contributes to the REF2029 submission, recognising that these may not be the same individuals as staff with SRR. This iterative approach ensures that potential unintended bias or adverse impact is identified and mitigated at key stages of the REF process.

Findings from the EIA have informed:

- Enhanced guidance and discussion prompts for line managers during pathway negotiations;
- Reinforcement of equality and diversity training for decision-makers;
- Ongoing monitoring of pathway allocation patterns at institutional level.

Where issues are identified, the Dean of Research and Knowledge Exchange will work with the Marjon Athena Swan Team and the Equality and Diversity Committee to agree and implement appropriate mitigations. The outcomes of the EIA are reported in Annex H and this will continue to be reviewed at key REF decision points.

### **Part 3: Determining Research Independence**

Plymouth Marjon University applies a clear, consistent and transparent approach to determining research independence for the purposes of REF2029, in line with REF guidance. Research independence is assessed only where required by REF rules and is distinct from the identification of contracts with significant responsibility for research.

#### **Criteria and Evidence for Research Independence**

All academic staff on teaching and research contracts who have been identified as having significant responsibility for research are automatically considered independent researchers. This determination is based on role expectations defined within the Academic Promotion and Career Development Procedure (Annex E), which establishes that staff on the research pathway are expected to design, lead and disseminate independent research as a substantive component of their role. Research independence therefore does not require further assessment for these staff.

For staff on research-only contracts (ACEMPFUN 2), research independence is assessed in accordance with REF guidance. An independent researcher is defined as an individual who undertakes self-directed research, rather than carrying out another individual's research programme. Indicators of research independence may include, but are not limited to:

- Acting as principal investigator or co-investigator on an externally funded research project or equivalent;
- Holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship where research independence is a requirement;
- Leading a research group or a substantial or specialised work package;
- Having significant responsibility for the design, conduct and interpretation of research.

Being named on research outputs alone does not demonstrate research independence. Where outputs are used as part of the evidence base, the individual's contribution must demonstrate substantial intellectual leadership or responsibility for the research.

#### **Decision-Making Process and Communication**

Staff on research-only contracts will be invited to submit an initial self-assessment indicating whether they believe they meet the REF criteria for research independence, supported by appropriate evidence. Decisions regarding research independence for research-only staff will be made by the REF2029 Steering Group, which applies the REF criteria consistently across the institution. The Steering Group will consider the evidence provided and reach a judgement on whether research independence is demonstrated. The REF2029 Steering Group meets once per term. Decisions will be recorded formally and communicated to the staff member in writing within three weeks of the meeting, including feedback where appropriate.

#### **Staff, Committees, and Training**

The staff, committee structures and training arrangements for determining research independence are the same as those described in Part 2 for identifying significant responsibility for research.

All individuals involved in advisory or decision-making roles undertake mandatory institutional equality and diversity training, alongside REF2029-specific equality and inclusion training, to ensure decisions are made fairly, consistently and in line with REF principles.

#### **Appeals**

The appeals process is set out in part 2 and Annex F. Staff on research-only contracts may appeal decisions regarding research independence made by the REF2029 Steering Group.

#### **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and Support for Staff**

Given the small number of staff on research-only contracts at Plymouth Marjon University, quantitative equality impact assessment in relation to research independence may be limited. However, the

characteristics of staff in this group will be reviewed by the REF Steering Group to ensure that no individual or group is disadvantaged as a result of the application of REF criteria. Any equality issues identified will be reported to the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee and, where appropriate, addressed in collaboration with the Equality and Diversity Committee and Athena Swan group.

In line with its commitment to equity and inclusion, Plymouth Marjon University supports all academic and research staff, regardless of contract type or working pattern, to develop as researchers and to have the quality and impact of their work recognised. This includes equal access to researcher development opportunities, training and mentoring; flexible working arrangements and wellbeing support; and participation in staff networks and institutional decision-making processes, including REF-related activities. These measures ensure that fixed-term and part-time staff, including contract research staff, are supported equitably and are not disadvantaged in relation to research independence or career development.

## **Part 4: Allocating Contracts to UoAs**

Plymouth Marjon University is planning a submission to three REF Units of Assessment (UoAs): Education; Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism; and Social Work and Social Policy.

### **Criteria and evidence for allocating contracts to UoAs**

The allocation of staff contracts to UoAs within the HESA staff record will be based primarily on the location of the member of staff within the University's academic structure, reflecting their principal disciplinary affiliation. The University has two faculties: the Faculty of Public, Professional and Community Studies, and the PMU Academic Partnership Network. The majority of academic and research staff are located within the Faculty of Public, Professional and Community Studies, which comprises the following departments:

- Education
- Allied Health and Nursing
- Sport
- Human Sciences, Society and Culture

In most cases, staff will be mapped to the UoA that most closely aligns with their departmental discipline (for example, Education staff to the Education UoA, Sport staff to the Sport UoA). This approach provides a transparent and consistent basis for allocation.

Plymouth Marjon University recognises the interdisciplinary nature of its research environment. Much of our research is interdisciplinary, and there is a significant volume of pedagogic higher education research undertaken across departments, which will normally be returned through the Education UoA. The Social Work and Social Policy UoA spans health, social care, youth work and education, and may therefore include staff drawn from multiple departments.

Where staff research expertise aligns more closely with a UoA other than their departmental home, this may be taken into account in allocating staff contracts. In such cases, evidence considered may include research and teaching expertise, disciplinary alignment, and the nature of research activity undertaken. Information about existing outputs may be used as contextual evidence to inform decisions, but outputs do not determine contract allocation and do not need to be submitted to the same UoA as the staff contract is mapped.

Staff whose roles fall outside the standard departmental structure will have their contracts allocated to the most appropriate UoA based on their primary research and academic focus. Staff holding multiple contracts will normally be allocated to a single UoA. In a small number of cases, staff contracts may move between UoAs between annual returns where there has been a substantive and sustained shift in research focus.

### **Decision-making, roles and communication**

Decisions regarding the allocation of staff contracts to UoAs will be made by the REF2029 Steering Group, which holds responsibility for ensuring consistency, transparency and alignment with REF guidance across the institution. Advisory input may be sought from Academic Directors of Department or other senior colleagues where appropriate. Staff will be informed of their proposed allocation as part of the REF2029 processes and will have the opportunity to seek clarification or raise concerns through established communication channels. Final decisions will rest with the REF2029 Steering Group.

### **Training, appeals and EIA**

The staff, committees, training, appeals process and equality impact assessment arrangements for allocating contracts to UoAs are aligned with those described earlier for determining significant responsibility for research. The appeals process is set out in part 2 and Annex F. It allows staff to appeal decisions about pathway choice, allocation to a specific Unit of Assessment, and/or decisions relating to the selection of outputs for REF submission.

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has informed the development and application of policies and procedures for allocating contracts to UoAs. The EIA considered whether allocation processes could disproportionately disadvantage staff with protected characteristics, including those working part-time, and on fractional contracts. The University is satisfied that the criteria applied are objective, transparent and inclusive, and that appropriate mitigations are in place through flexibility in allocation decisions and access to appeals.

## **Part 5: Selecting outputs**

### **Overview**

Plymouth Marjon University will apply a consistent, fair and transparent approach to the selection of outputs for REF2029. Oversight of output selection will be exercised centrally through the REF2029 Steering Group to ensure consistency of approach across all Units of Assessment. Potential outputs will be identified through a systematic review of the University's research repository alongside a call out to all staff on the research pathway, as well as a wider alert to all staff to ensure that eligible outputs and diverse research contributions are not overlooked. Selection processes will be conducted in line with the University's values and based on clear, published criteria including self and peer-evaluation (see Annex D). A wide range of output types appropriate to the disciplinary context will be considered for submission. Outputs will be assessed through qualitative judgement against the REF criteria of originality, significance and rigour. Each output will be peer reviewed by at least two people in addition to the self-evaluation. Where self and peer ratings are aligned, an average will be used to designate the output's quality band. Where there is a significant discrepancy (e.g. by more than one star rating), the UoA Coordinator will seek a third peer review before the output is ranked.

Plymouth Marjon University recognises that staff contributions to the output pool will vary according to disciplinary norms, research career stage, contractual status, personal circumstances and wider roles within the University. There is no expectation that all staff with significant responsibility for research will contribute equally to the output pool. Selection processes will be applied flexibly and inclusively, taking appropriate account of individual context while maintaining consistent quality thresholds. Where outputs are co-authored, discussions will take account of individual contributions, but outputs will not be allocated to individual authors. The emphasis of the selection process is on assembling a high-quality, representative and inclusive submission at Unit of Assessment level. Following peer review and consideration of outputs by the REF2029 Steering Group, staff will normally receive feedback on output reviews within two weeks of the relevant meeting. This feedback will relate solely to the assessment of outputs and will not indicate or imply any decisions regarding inclusion in the final REF submission.

### **Substantive link to outputs**

Plymouth Marjon University will apply a consistent and transparent approach to determining whether an output has a substantive link to the University. An output will be considered to have a substantive link where the research was produced by any staff member where there is an eligible employment relationship with Marjon within the REF assessment period. This means they must have:

- A minimum of 0.2 FTE for at least 12 months continuous employment at Marjon and
- A role which includes an explicit expectation of research activity (for academic staff, this includes anyone on a teaching and research contract, not just those with SRR)

An eligible employment relationship must have occurred, either:

- At the point at which the submitted output was first made publicly available, OR
- Before the submitted output was first made publicly available, when the research resulting in the output was carried out (usually within two years)

Eligible employment relationships that occur after the point at which an output was first made publicly available cannot constitute a substantive link except in exceptional circumstances for long-form outputs. Decisions regarding substantive link will be made by the REF2029 Steering Group, informed by documentary evidence including contract dates, author affiliation, and contribution statements where required. The same criteria and evidential standards will be applied to outputs authored by current and former members of staff.

### **Responsible research assessment**

Plymouth Marjon University is committed to responsible research assessment in line with the principles of DORA. Quantitative indicators (such as journal-based metrics or citation data) may be used only as contextual information and will never be used as a proxy for research quality or as a determinative factor in decision-making. All assessments will be based on expert peer review and qualitative judgement, aligned with REF assessment criteria. All members of the REF2029 Steering Group will be required to declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest. This includes, but

is not limited to, circumstances where an individual is an author or co-author of outputs under consideration. Where a conflict of interest arises, the individual concerned will not be involved in the review, discussion, or recommendation relating to the relevant outputs. In such cases, the individual will withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the discussion.

### **Outputs with a substantive link via former staff**

Where the substantive link to an output exists via a former member of staff, Plymouth Marjon University will apply fair, consistent and transparent procedures for selection. This includes eligible outputs authored by staff who:

- have retired or moved to a new institution
- have taken voluntary severance
- have left following the expiry of a fixed-term contract

Outputs meeting the substantive link criteria will be reviewed through internal and, where appropriate, external peer review. These outputs will be assessed against the same quality thresholds as those of current staff. No output will be excluded solely on the basis of the author's employment status. Decisions regarding inclusion of outputs from staff who have been compulsorily made redundant will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the REF steering group and in line with the University's values, ensuring that staff are not disadvantaged as a result of institutional restructuring.

### **Allocation of outputs to Units of Assessment**

The REF2029 Steering Group will oversee the allocation of outputs to Units of Assessment (UoAs), informed by disciplinary fit, the primary research focus of the output, and REF guidance. Decisions will be made transparently and consistently across the institution. For interdisciplinary outputs, the Steering Group will consider the most appropriate UoA or UoAs, taking into account the intended audience, research methodology, and the alignment of the output with UoA descriptors. Where REF rules permit, outputs may be submitted to more than one UoA. Staff will be consulted on proposed UoA allocation, but final decisions will rest with the REF2029 Steering Group to ensure coherence and quality of submissions.

Once the output pool for each unit of assessment has been collated via the processes described above, the outputs will be rank ordered by self and peer ratings and selected by the REF steering group for inclusion in the UoA up to the number required by the HESA volume measure on the basis of maximising the quality of submission to each unit of assessment whilst ensuring, as far as possible, a wide distribution of outputs across staff. In cases where the same estimated quality profile would be achieved by the inclusion of different outputs then preference will be given to outputs produced by current members of staff and, where appropriate, outputs that support an inclusive and representative submission, including those produced by staff with protected characteristics. This will ensure that submissions are representative of the research undertaken within each unit during the REF period without lowering quality thresholds.

### **Ensuring representativeness of submissions**

In finalising submissions, the REF2029 Steering Group will review the proposed output set at Unit of Assessment level to ensure that, alongside maximising quality, the submission is broadly representative of the research undertaken within the submitting unit during the REF period. This will include consideration of the range of research themes, methodologies, and output types present within the unit, and ensuring that no significant areas of research activity are systematically excluded without clear justification. Where equally strong quality profiles can be achieved through alternative combinations of outputs, the Steering Group will seek to ensure that the selected outputs reflect the breadth of research activity within the unit, taking into account disciplinary diversity, output types, and staff identified as having significant responsibility for research.

### **Supporting and enabling diverse output types**

Plymouth Marjon University recognises and values a wide range of research outputs appropriate to disciplinary norms, including but not limited to journal articles, monographs, chapters, practice-based outputs, digital outputs, reports, and creative works. Procedures have been designed to actively encourage the identification and fair assessment of diverse output types through inclusive call-out processes, discipline-appropriate peer review, and the use of expert reviewers where required. No

output type will be disadvantaged in selection decisions provided it meets REF eligibility criteria and demonstrates originality, significance and rigour.

### **Outputs in British Sign Language and other recognised languages**

Outputs produced in British Sign Language will not be treated less favourably in output selection and will be assessed using appropriate expert peer review. Plymouth Marjon University does not normally produce outputs in Welsh or other recognised minority languages; however, where such outputs arise, they will be treated in accordance with their legal status and will not be disadvantaged in selection processes. The University is committed to ensuring equitable treatment of research outputs regardless of language of production.

### **Training, appeals and EIA**

The staff, committees and training, appeals process and equality impact assessment for selecting research outputs are broadly in line with those detailed for determining significant responsibility for research. Whilst we do not anticipate the likelihood of appeals due to the approach proposed in selecting outputs, the grounds for appeal could include the exclusion of a particular output in light of procedural irregularity. The appeal process will not consider academic judgement issues in relation to the estimated output rating of a particular output by internal and/or external peer-review.

In the case of equality impact assessment it is important to note that the expectation is that equality does not imply an expectation that the number of outputs per individual, with protected characteristics, will be equal between characteristics and/or in comparison to those without protected characteristics. For example, pregnancy and maternity is likely to be accounted for by reducing the number of outputs submitted by an individual. The number of outputs will be compared between those with protected characteristics, taking into account individual circumstances and grade of the staff member.

## **Part 6: Appendices**

- A) **Annex A: Decision making and Advisory Roles and Structures**
- B) **Annex B: Committee and Steering Group Terms of Reference**
- C) **Annex C: Timetable of REF Activities**
- D) **Annex D: REF Policies and Procedures**
- E) **Annex E: Academic Promotion and Career Development Procedure**
- F) **Annex F: Appeals process**
- G) **Annex G: Equality Impact Assessment**

## Annex A: Decision Making and Advisory Roles and Structures

| Decision Makers                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Position                                        | Role in decision making structure                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Rationale                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Vice-Chancellor                                 | Final approval of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>REF Strategy</li> <li>REF Code of Practice</li> <li>REF2029 Submission</li> </ul> Advised by Dean of RKE and REF Steering Group                                                                                                                      | By virtue of position as Head of Plymouth Marjon University and Chair of Senate                                                                                                                                                               |
| Dean of Research and Knowledge Exchange         | Formulation and recommendation of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>REF Strategy</li> <li>REF Code of Practice</li> <li>REF2029 Submission</li> </ul> Accountabilities and responsibilities identified in REF2029 Steering Group as chair.                                                               | The most senior officer with specific responsibility for research. Chair of the REF2029 Steering Group and Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee.                                                                                         |
| Advisory Roles                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Unit of Assessment Coordinators                 | Experienced researchers who liaise with staff, prepare and edit SPRE statements and support impact case studies, provide advice on the selection of research outputs, provide advice on the selection of external assessors, and collate and check information appropriate to the relevant planned submission. | Experienced researchers who provide valuable advice, not decision makers in order to ensure consistency across all units of assessment.                                                                                                       |
| Research and Knowledge Exchange Support Officer | Acts as the institutional administrative contact for REF2029, managing access and use of the submission software and any physical outputs.                                                                                                                                                                     | The research and knowledge exchange support officer is the RKE Office administrator with responsibility for REF, reports to the Dean of RKE and will act as the REF2029 administrative manager.                                               |
| External Advisors                               | External advisors will be selected by the REF2029 Steering Group on the basis of their relevant experience. Provide external advice on the quality and development of outputs, impact case studies and environment statements. Comments made by external advisors will be viewed alongside other evidence      | All external advisors will be made aware of the Code of Practice. External advisors will not provide advice that is used to inform decisions. External advisors will not be given any information relating to individual staff circumstances. |
| Advisory Structures                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Committee/Group                                 | Role                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Formation and Membership                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Senate                                          | Receives and approves reports from Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Annex B                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee       | Receives and confirms reports from REF2029 Steering Group. Ensures broad oversight of REF2029 Steering Group.                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Annex B                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| REF2029 Steering Group                          | Responsible and accountable for operational aspects of REF2029 including preparation of REF2029 strategy, application of code of practice and preparation of UOAs                                                                                                                                              | Annex B                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

## **Annex B: Committee and Steering Group Terms of Reference**

**Terms of Reference for relevant committees available here:**

**<https://www.marjon.ac.uk/about-marjon/institutional-documents/terms-of-reference/>**

## Annex C: Timetable of REF Activities (To be updated on rolling basis)

| Date                          | Plymouth Marjon University Activity                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| March 2024                    | Four in-house REF workshops organised, one per RKE group. Workshops based on the 'REF Initial Decisions' information and involved reviewing progress since REF2021 and forward planning for REF2029 |
| July-Sept 2024                | 'REF Unit of Assessment discussion paper' drafted and circulated to RKE group leads and ADRI's                                                                                                      |
| November 2024                 | Decision to submit to 3 UoA's for REF 2029 provisionally approved by RKEC                                                                                                                           |
| January 2025                  | REF working group established with representation from academic and professional services staff (name later changed to REF Steering group to align with wider university nomenclature)              |
| January 2025                  | Repository outputs extracted and mapped to UoAs                                                                                                                                                     |
| January-February 2025         | RKE audit survey circulated to staff to identify widest possible range of RKE activity. Individual meetings with ADRI's who offer support and guidance on RKE development                           |
| February 2025                 | First section of Code of Practice (CoP) drafted indicating criteria for attributing significant responsibility for research (SRR)                                                                   |
| March 2025                    | REF working group meet and discuss E&D issues related to CoP<br>Consideration of DORA principles                                                                                                    |
| March 2025                    | Updated Research Data Management Policy drafted and discussed at RKEC                                                                                                                               |
| May-June 2025                 | In-house REF workshops for Education, Sport and Social Work and Social Policy UoAs. Planning for Submission to REF2029                                                                              |
| July 2025                     | REF steering group meet.<br>Discuss new CoP guidance and the PCE pilot                                                                                                                              |
| August 2025                   | HESA return for REF pilot year (2024-25) completed using research pathway as a proxy for SRR                                                                                                        |
| September 2025                | Unit of Assessment coordinators agreed and membership of REF steering group updated                                                                                                                 |
| November 2025                 | REF steering group meet and finalise process for self-assessment of outputs; internal reviewer training proposed                                                                                    |
| November 2025                 | REF self-evaluation of outputs commences – with online form and guidance published                                                                                                                  |
| December 2025                 | REF drop-in sessions to support self-evaluation process                                                                                                                                             |
| December 2025 – February 2026 | Preparation of working draft of REF code of practice for consultation                                                                                                                               |
| January 2026                  | REF briefing open to all staff and recorded for those who cannot attend<br>Introduces the Code of Practice, alongside key REF processes                                                             |
| February 2026                 | REF training for self and peer evaluation                                                                                                                                                           |
| February-March 2026           | JNCC and open staff consultation on working draft of Code of Practice,                                                                                                                              |

# REF 2029

## Research Excellence Framework

|             |                                                                                                         |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|             | including workshops & anonymous online survey                                                           |
| March 2026  | REF CoP reviewed by RKEC with recommendation to approve                                                 |
| April 2026  | REF CoP and EIA approved by Senate                                                                      |
| April 2026  | REF peer review process commences                                                                       |
| April 2026  | Research-only staff invited to submit self-assessment evidencing research independence for REF purposes |
| May 2026    | Submission of CoP and EIA                                                                               |
| August 2026 | Approval of CoP and EIA                                                                                 |

## Annex D: REF 2029 Staff Policies and Procedures

### 1. Introduction

This document explains how Plymouth Marjon University will implement its REF Code of Practice in processes affecting staff. It sets out what decisions will be made, who makes them, what evidence is used, and how fairness is ensured.

The approach is guided by:

- Marjon University values
- Equality, diversity and inclusion principles
- Responsible research assessment
- Transparency and consistency

### 2. What constitutes Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) for REF?

REF2029 breaks the link between individuals and outputs in REF submission. Thus, contracts which are allocated Significant Responsibility for Research (SRR) make up the university's volume measure, rather than directly indicating which people need to return outputs or impact case studies to the REF. The volume measure assesses the scale of a higher education institution's research capacity and is used to determine the number of outputs and impact case studies required for each Unit of Assessment (UoA) submission.

An employment contract is considered to include Significant Responsibility for Research where the role includes an explicit and ongoing expectation to undertake independent research. For academic staff at Plymouth Marjon University, this is evidenced by self-selection of the research pathway and includes:

- Designing and conducting independent research
- Allocated workload time for research
- Developing a research profile and outputs
- Engagement with the research environment (e.g. funding, collaboration, PGR activity, mentoring)

This decision is role-based and forward-looking. It does not depend on past publications or performance.

### 3. What constitutes Research Independence?

All academic staff on teaching and research contracts who have been identified as having Significant Responsibility for Research are automatically considered independent researchers. Research-only staff will complete a short self-assessment with evidence showing whether they:

- Lead or design research
- Act as principal investigator or equivalent
- Make independent intellectual contributions
- Disseminate research in their own right

Being named on a research output is not in itself sufficient reason for inclusion. Where outputs are used as part of the evidence base, the individual's contribution must demonstrate substantial intellectual leadership or responsibility for the research.

# REF 2029

## Research Excellence Framework

The REF2029 Steering Group makes the final decision on research independence for Research-only staff, using REF guidance criteria applied consistently across the University.

### 4. How will Staff Contracts be Allocated to Units of Assessment (UoA)?

Staff are normally assigned to a UoA based on their disciplinary home within the academic structure (for example, Education staff to the Education UoA, Sport staff to the Sport UoA).

Other evidence which may be considered includes:

- Research expertise
- Teaching area
- Nature of research activity

Information about existing outputs may be used as contextual evidence to inform decisions, but outputs do not determine contract allocation and do not need to be submitted to the same UoA as the staff contract is mapped.

Final decisions will be made by the REF2029 Steering Group

### 5. What Counts as an Eligible Employment Relationship with the University?

Institutions may submit outputs produced by any staff member where there is an eligible employment relationship with the submitting institution within the REF assessment period. Every output we submit must be (co)authored by someone with an eligible employment relationship with Marjon. This means they must have:

- A minimum of 0.2 FTE for at least 12 months continuous employment at Marjon and
- a role which includes an explicit expectation of research activity (for academic staff, this includes anyone on a teaching and research contract, not just those with SRR)

An eligible employment relationship must have occurred, either:

- At the point at which the submitted output was first made publicly available, OR
- Before the submitted output was first made publicly available, when the research resulting in the output was carried out (usually within two years)

Eligible employment relationships that occur after the point at which an output was first made publicly available cannot constitute a substantive link except in exceptional circumstances for long-form outputs.

### 6. What is the Eligible Time Period for REF outputs?

To be eligible for REF2029, outputs must be first published between **1 January 2021 and 31 December 2028** and must be made open access within 3 months of acceptance (if prior to 1 January 2026) or within 3 months of publication – from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026. Deposit of author-accepted manuscripts in the university repository is a free route to meeting this requirement.

### 7. Identifying and Reviewing Outputs

Eligible outputs for REF can include:

- Journal articles
- Books and book chapters

# REF 2029

## Research Excellence Framework

- Practice and artistic outputs
- Software, patents, datasets

Outputs will be gathered through:

- Institutional repository review
- Call to research pathway staff
- University-wide notification to all staff

This ensures diverse research is not overlooked. The separation in REF2029 between individual staff members and unit submissions means that there is no obligation for staff who are on the Research pathway to submit outputs to REF; equally those on other pathways can have eligible outputs included if on a teaching and research contract.

There is no minimum output requirement for staff on volume-submitting contracts, thus there is no need for a process to account for individual equality-related circumstances. A maximum of 5 outputs can be attributed to any one individual in each UoA.

All outputs will be assessed against the REF criteria of originality, significance and rigour in line with the published star ratings.

Assessment includes:

- Self-evaluation
- Internal peer review
- External peer review (where appropriate)

In line with DORA (Declaration on Research Assessment), research will be assessed on its own merits rather than on the outlet in which it is published. Journal prestige, publisher reputation, and metrics will not be used to judge quality.

Where staff have outputs in the repository but are not available due to maternity or other long-term leave, their outputs will receive an additional peer review in lieu of self-evaluation. They can opt to undertake a self-assessment on their return if the timescale allows.

## 8. Final Selection Process

Final selection of outputs will be undertaken once the volume measure is known for each UoA. The decision will include consideration of:

- Quality rating from reviewers
- Ranking of outputs by authors and UoA leads
- Representativeness of research in the UoA
- (Where quality is equal) preference may be given to current staff outputs or outputs supporting an inclusive submission

UoA leads will advise on final selection, but decisions will be made by the REF steering group

## 9. Former Staff Outputs

Outputs with an eligible employment relationship will be considered even if the author has:

- Retired or moved to a new institution
- Taken voluntary severance
- Completed a fixed-term contract

Decisions regarding inclusion of outputs from staff who have been compulsorily made redundant will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the REF steering group.

## 10. Decision-Making and Oversight

The REF2029 Steering Group ensures consistency across the University and makes final decisions on:

- Research independence (research-only staff)
- UoA allocation
- Output selection

All decisions follow published criteria and are documented. Any concerns about the decision-making process can be addressed through the appeals process as set out in Annex F.

## 11. Support for Staff

Staff can access REF briefings and guidance materials, researcher development opportunities, writing retreats and research mentoring through the Marjon RKE site. Further information about REF2029 is available here: <https://2029.ref.ac.uk/>

Please feel free to contact your UoA lead or the Dean of RKE for clarification at any stage.

## **Annex E: Academic Promotion and Career Development Procedure**

Marjon's Academic Promotion and Career Development Procedure is available [here](#). (internal staff only)

## Annex F: Appeals Process

### REF2029 Appeals Panel

Contact: [PeopleTeam@Marjon.ac.uk](mailto:PeopleTeam@Marjon.ac.uk)

The REF 2029 Appeals panel will decide if there is sufficient evidence to warrant reconsideration by the decision makers according to the published Code of Practice. Before submitting a formal appeal, staff are encouraged to seek clarification from the Dean of RKE or their UoA Coordinator. Formal appeals must be submitted within 20 working days of written notification of the relevant decision. It is normally expected that an appeal will be considered by written representation outlining what decision should be reconsidered and the justification, including evidence to substantiate where reasonable. Appeals should be directed to the People Team who will normally convene an appeals panel within 10 working days of an appeal request. The People team will acknowledge appeals within two working days of receipt. All appeals will be handled in strict confidence and in accordance with established institutional procedures, with access limited to those directly involved in administering and determining the appeal.

### Grounds for Appeal

The matters that can be considered for appeal include:

In relation to significant responsibility for research

- To review where staff feel they have selected their pathway incorrectly
- To review evidence where staff feel they have been unfairly treated as outlined in part 2

In relation to UoA allocation:

- To review where staff feel that their contract or outputs have been allocated incorrectly

In relation to research independence:

- To allow any staff on research contracts to appeal against the decision of the REF2029 steering group in relation to research independence.

In the case of the selection of outputs

- In case where staff feel there has been procedural irregularity regarding the inclusion/exclusion of a particular output
- The appeal process will not consider academic judgement issues in relation to the estimated output rating of a particular output by internal and/or external peer-review.

### Panel Composition

- Chief Academic Officer
- A Dean (not Dean of RKE or anyone with UoA Coordinator responsibility)
- People team representative

### Outcomes

The appellant will receive a written response from the People Team within 5 working days of the panel and the appeals panel will result in one of the following:

- The appeal is upheld or partially upheld in which case the REF2029 steering group will be informed of the appeal outcome and requested to amend the decision and consider how the appeal outcome might be better considered in future decision making
- The appeal is dismissed and the original decision would stand.

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Research Excellence Framework

There will be no further right of appeal under this REF2029 Appeals Process

# REF 2029

Research Excellence Framework

## Annex G: Equality Impact Assessment

**Plymouth Marjon University**



**REF 2029 Equality Impact Assessment**

**Version 1, April 2026**

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## Introduction

As set out in the REF 2029 Guidance, the funding bodies require all institutions to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) as part of their Code of Practice submission for REF 2029, in line with their legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The funding bodies' expectations are that all institutions will publish their final EIA after the submissions have been made, including outcomes of actions taken, as a matter of good practice. The EIAs will be used by the funding bodies and the People and Diversity Advisory Panel to assist with evaluating the overall effectiveness of the equality and diversity aspects of the REF at sector level, and identify lessons for the future.

This EIA outlines the ways in which Marjon's decision-making regarding REF takes account of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), and demonstrates that policies and procedures:

- are designed and implemented in a way that aligns with the three aims of the PSED
- avoid unjustified disadvantage, particularly where less discriminatory alternatives may be available
- reflect an anticipatory, transparent, and evidence-informed approach to equality

The following information is of particular interest to the REF 2029 People and Diversity Advisory Panel:

- The final analysis of data comparing the protected characteristics, where available, between volume contributing and non-volume contributing staff.
- Any actions taken to prevent direct or indirect discrimination or advance equality during the selection process and their outcomes, including the justification for and/or actions taken to address any differential impact that staff selection may have had on particular groups, and information about any policies or practices that had a positive impact on equality during the selection process.

This report presents the Marjon REF 2029 Code of Practice EIA version 1, which includes the diversity demographics (where available) based on HESA 2024-25 data analysed by age, disability, gender, race/nationality, religion/belief, and sexual orientation. The EIA was led by Professor Debby Cotton, Dean of Research and Knowledge Exchange and Professor of Higher Education. The EIA report was produced by a Sub-Group of our REF Steering Group, including Professor Debby Cotton, Dean of Research and Knowledge Exchange, Dr Philadelphia Iglehart, Research Impact Officer, and Claire Stevens, Director of People and Operations. Staff diversity data were provided by Helen De Sousa, People Services Manager. The Code of Practice was recommended for approval by the Marjon Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2026 and approved by Senate in April 2026.

# REF 2029

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## Background

Plymouth Marjon is a small, values-based university with a 180-year heritage of social justice and transformative education. We focus on the holistic development of our students: academically, socially and spiritually. We have a significant positive trajectory of research excellence aligned to our values of curiosity, ambition, humanity, and independence. The Marjon 2030 Strategy describes an institution 'steeped in care and compassion' and 'committed to working in partnership, exploring possibility and providing space for difference and diversity'. A key enabler of the strategy is the 'People' strand, centred on values-based leadership, behaviours and decision making and encouraging collaboration and inclusivity. Our people-centred approach means that to 89% of staff identify with Marjon's values, with 78% indicating their work contributes to the university's mission and shared sense of purpose. 84% of staff agree that colleagues are committed to excellence and supporting each other (all figures from 2025 staff survey).

In addition to a commitment to an inclusive community in the university, Marjon's EDI policy seeks to ensure that people are not privileged or subject to less favourable treatment on the grounds of any protected characteristic, background, identity or type of contract. Diversity and equality are recognised, encouraged, promoted and valued at all levels of the University and in all its functions. Clear equality objectives are formed through reviewing our data and creating actions where we can measure the impact of our work. Progress against objectives is shared through our annual Equality Report.

Understanding our working environment and context is important when considering our approach to REF 2029, and EIA. As a small workforce we aim to be collaborative and take a team-based approach to most initiatives, and this is evidenced through the management of our REF 2029 submission. The REF 2029 Steering Group, responsible for operationalising and making recommendations on the REF submission, was formed in line with the Terms of Reference in the Marjon REF 2029 Code of Practice (Annex B). The selection processes for membership, including direct selection, ensured the group had suitable cross University representation and every effort was made to ensure a diverse panel. The group is 60% female, 40% male, similar to our overall workforce. In addition, members of the steering group include staff with disabilities and non-British staff, which reflects the wider workforce.

In line with our value of humanity, and building on our heritage as an inclusive community, Marjon holds the Investors in People Award, the Social Enterprise Mark, the Disability Two Ticks, and are a Stonewall Diversity Champion; recently, we were also awarded an Athena Swan Bronze Award, and we actively support the engagement of female staff with Advance HE's Women's leadership programme. Crucially, we embed consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion in all our activities. All within the Plymouth Marjon University community are required to engage with our in-house equality and

diversity training. Those staff involved in decision-making roles will engage in REF 2029 specific E&D training.

### Implementing the Marjon REF 2029 Code of Practice

The processes identified in the Marjon REF 2029 Code of Practice for the identification of staff with Significant Responsibility for Research (part 2), research independence (part 3) allocating contracts to UoAs (part 4), and selection of outputs (part 5) are being followed in developing the REF 2029 submission. The REF 2029 Steering Group has a standing item ensuring alignment with the Marjon REF 2029 Code of Practice and it is referred to thoroughly at key decision-making points. The associated REF 2029 EIA will be iteratively updated and any adjustments that would enhance inclusivity will be discussed and agreed. Additionally, the outcomes of the different stages will continue to be communicated regularly with staff in line with the REF 2029 Code of Practice Working Timeline (Annex C). This overall approach invites appeals to be submitted by any staff member as part of these processes; should any be submitted, they will be considered on the basis of the relevant section of the Marjon REF 2029 Code of Practice.

Two key pathways through which the selection process has the potential to impact negatively upon an inclusive REF 2029 submission include:

- **STAFF WITH SRR.** Discrimination might apply at the point of identifying staff with a significant responsibility for research (SRR) and research independence. The primary risk was related to SRR since most staff with SRR were automatically considered as independent researchers by virtue of being on the research pathway on teaching and research contracts (Marjon REF 2029 Code of Practice, Part 3, para. 2). Staff select their own academic pathway, but there remains a possibility that discriminatory processes within the system could mean that staff with protected characteristics or part time staff are under-represented in this group.
- **PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS AND OUTPUTS.** It is also possible that there is an identifiable impact of protected characteristics on the inclusion of outputs from the output pool within the Marjon REF 2029 submission. The Marjon Code of Practice identified a clearly defined process for selecting outputs (Marjon REF 2029 Code of Practice, Part 5) that broadly can be described as maximising the quality of submission with the inclusion of the highest rated output for each person and then the best of the rest with preference given to outputs that improve the inclusivity of the submission. Analysis of the selected outputs and linked HESA identifiers will be used to assess any under-representation at this stage.

It is specifically worth noting some mitigating factors in relation to these key risks and the principles of REF 2029 and demonstrating fairness to staff via the following key headlines:

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- **TRANSPARENCY.** Regular briefings have been held with staff (open to all) and updates have been reported within university governance structures (e.g. Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee, Senate, and The Board of Governors). A reviewer training session was held on 11 Feb 2026, with a follow-up session to support self-review on 24 Feb 2026. Drop-in workshops have been held for staff in support of self-assessment and helping staff understand the criteria for REF 2029. Feedback on outputs being considered for inclusion in the REF 2029 submission will be provided to authors once reviews are completed. The outputs included within the submission and processes for selecting them are outlined fully in the CoP and a full university-wide consultation around the REF 2029 processes has taken place, as well as formal consultation with the unions. Overall, the approach taken will be an inclusive learning approach aiming for colleagues to develop their understanding of the REF guidance and criteria and decision-making processes.
- **CONSISTENCY.** As identified in the Marjon REF 2029 Code and Practice, all decisions regarding the REF 2029 submission will be made centrally (as opposed to being devolved to units/schools) and will be operationally agreed and recommended for approval by the REF 2029 Steering Group. The REF 2029 Steering Group currently meets quarterly and has a shared repository for information (MS Teams Area, excluding personal data), including, for example, a complete list of outputs being considered for submission and self-review scores. To this will be added information on impact case studies and internal / external reviewer scores of outputs.
- **ACCOUNTABILITY.** The REF 2029 Steering Group reports to the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee regularly on progress preparing the REF 2029 submission. All members of the steering group will engage in REF-specific equality training (most likely via Pearn Kandola, pending approval). In due course, the final submission, including Strategy, People and Research Environment statements, Impact Case Studies and list of outputs, will be sent for to the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee and to Senate for approval.
- **INCLUSIVITY.** The self-selection process to identify those with a significant responsibility for research (via selecting the research pathway), as outlined in the Marjon REF 2029 Code of Practice, by its very nature encourages inclusivity. The decision to utilise a self-selection process for identifying those with a SRR built on the development of the Academic Promotion and Career Development Procedure, which engaged colleagues in a consultative process. The selection of outputs also considers equality factors as outlined in the Marjon REF 2029 Code of Practice (Part 5, para. 2, 8).

## Analysis of Data

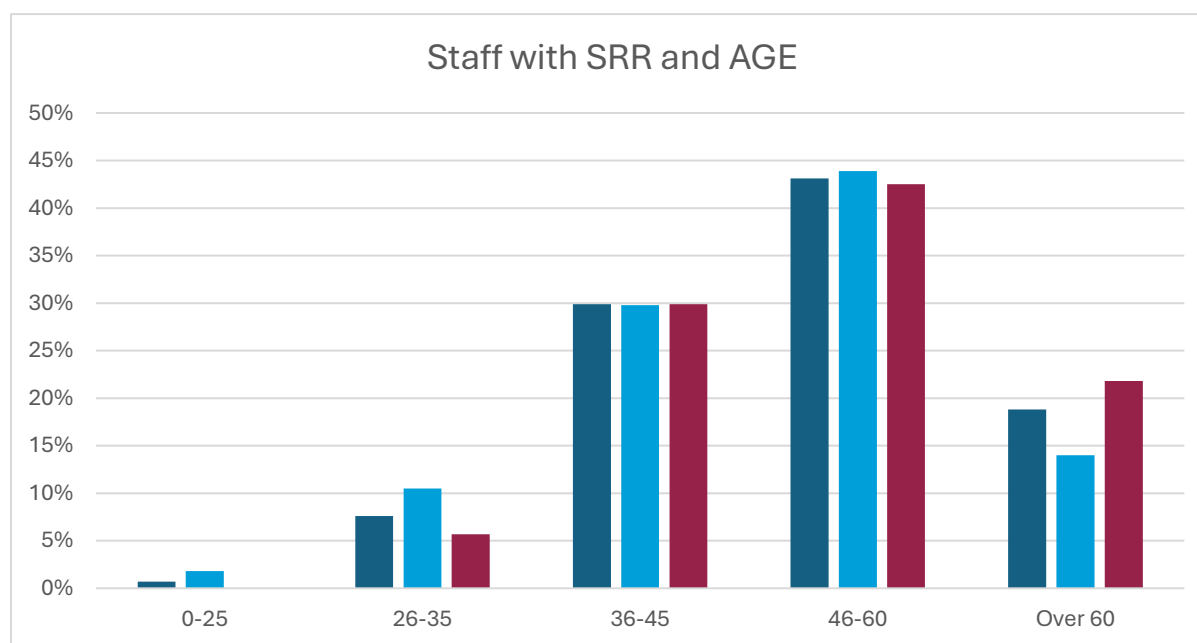
### Summary

The defined process in the Marjon REF 2029 Code of Practice resulted in 57 staff with SRR out of a population of 144 academic staff (39.6%) in the pilot year HESA return (2024-25). The Marjon REF 2029 Code of Practice (Part 2, para. 6) outlines that all academic career development pathways have an identified route through the grades to professorship, since all aspects play a critical role to the vibrancy and success of Plymouth Marjon University as a learning community centred on student success. The balance of a little over one-third of all academics with SRR reflects an expected pattern between research, learning and teaching, leadership and management, and knowledge exchange, and reinforces the no-detriment approach.

The following analysis has been undertaken to compare staff with SRR for the purposes of REF 2029 against the general academic staff population at Plymouth Marjon University, as well as the allocation of staff to UoAs. The data for the general academic staff population is based on a population of 144 as per the data submitted for the 2024-25 HESA return. At this stage (with reviewing currently underway), the quantitative analysis could not consider outputs and compare the characteristics of the academic staff to whom they are attributed against the wider population; this analysis will be undertaken after reviewing is completed.

## Age

**RISK:** Younger age category staff may be excluded from the REF due to the more limited time frame for generation of outputs and lower experience than their older colleagues, and this may affect their ability to produce high-quality research. There is also a risk those in older age categories, especially approaching retirement age, may be treated less favourably when considering resources for long-term research projects. This may deny the older individual the opportunity to produce high-quality research.



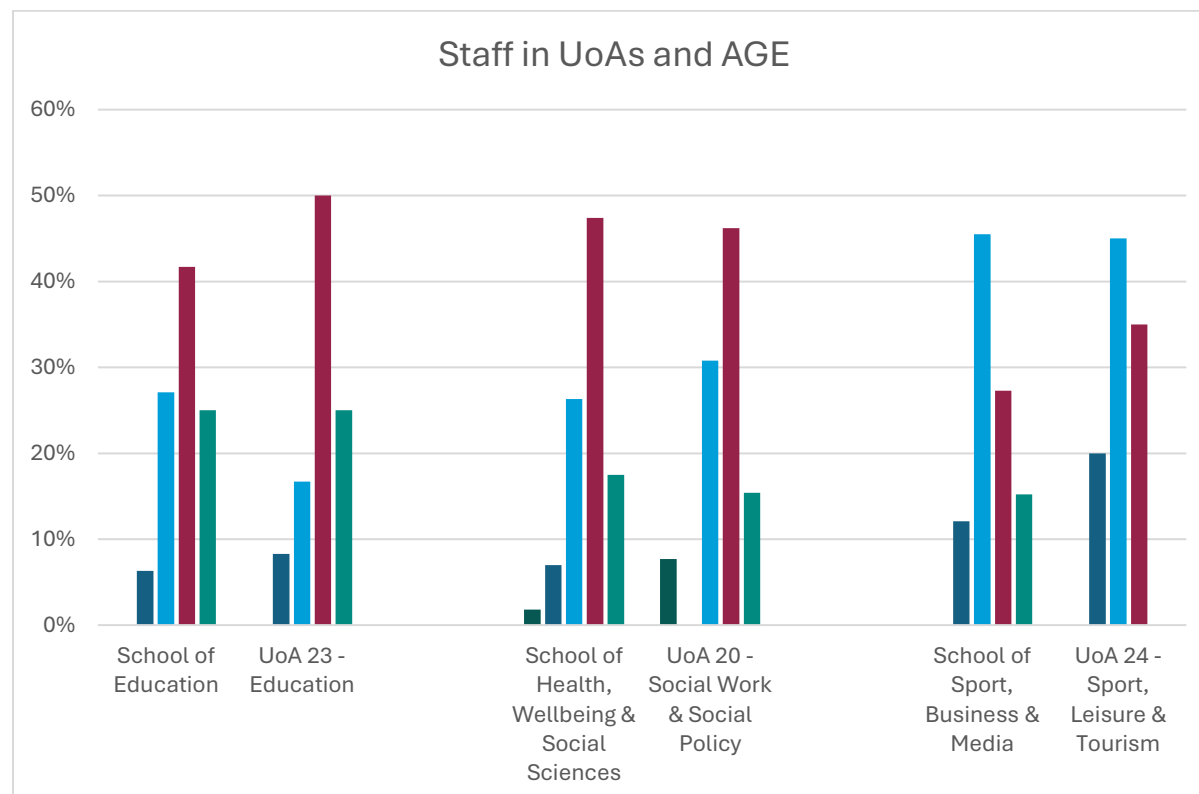
**Figure 1: Comparison of staff with SRR and AGE**

**ANALYSIS:** Figure 1 compares the proportion of staff across HESA age categories between staff with SRR and those without SRR against the general academic staff population. Overall, the age distribution of staff with SRR is comparable to the general staff population.

The two lowest age groups, 0-25 years and 26-35 years, were slightly over-represented at 1.8% and 10.5%, rather than 0.7% and 7.6%, respectively, for the total academic population. Although the numbers in the 0-25 age group are too small to be significant, these data suggest Marjon has learned from the previous REF and has improved support for younger academics / early career researchers (ECRs) wanting to conduct research.

Such support may come at the cost of the Over 60 age category; there is a slightly lower proportion of SRR staff in this group (14%) compared to the academic population (18.8%). However, this may simply reflect older staff being more likely to be on a leadership and management pathway rather than research. As in the whole data set, it is often hard to discern what might represent a trend of concern

and which patterns are simply due to low overall numbers in the analysis. It is worth noting that, in a small institution with a cohort of 57 staff with SRR, these variances of percentages are very small numerically; if only two staff fell into different categories due to, e.g., early retirement, moving away, changing careers, etc., there could easily be a balance among all cohorts.



**Figure 2: Staff Allocation to UoAs and AGE**

**ANALYSIS:** At the School and Unit of Assessment level, the picture presented by **Figure 2** is somewhat different. There is a greater imbalance, some of which is likely to be caused by the smaller numbers within the different cohorts. The total number of staff with SRR in the UoAs is between 13 and 24. A change of one or two members of staff with a different characteristic in any category could change the percentages enough to make such differences look more meaningful than they might be. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, the overall difference in percentages across all three Schools / UoAs and categories is not large, with a few exceptions noted below.

In Education, percentages for both the at-risk categories of the youngest (0-25 and 26-35) and oldest (Over 60) staff members are similar between School and UoA. It is in the middle age groups where there is the most difference (36-45: 27.1% compared with 16.7%; 46-60: 41.7% compared with 50%). Many academic staff having had successful, prior careers aligned with UoA 23 as teachers, school

# REF 2029

## Research Excellence Framework

leaders, and youth and community professionals, and this change in career would mean some of these staff are likely to be early career researchers, which may distort the data in these mid-age categories.

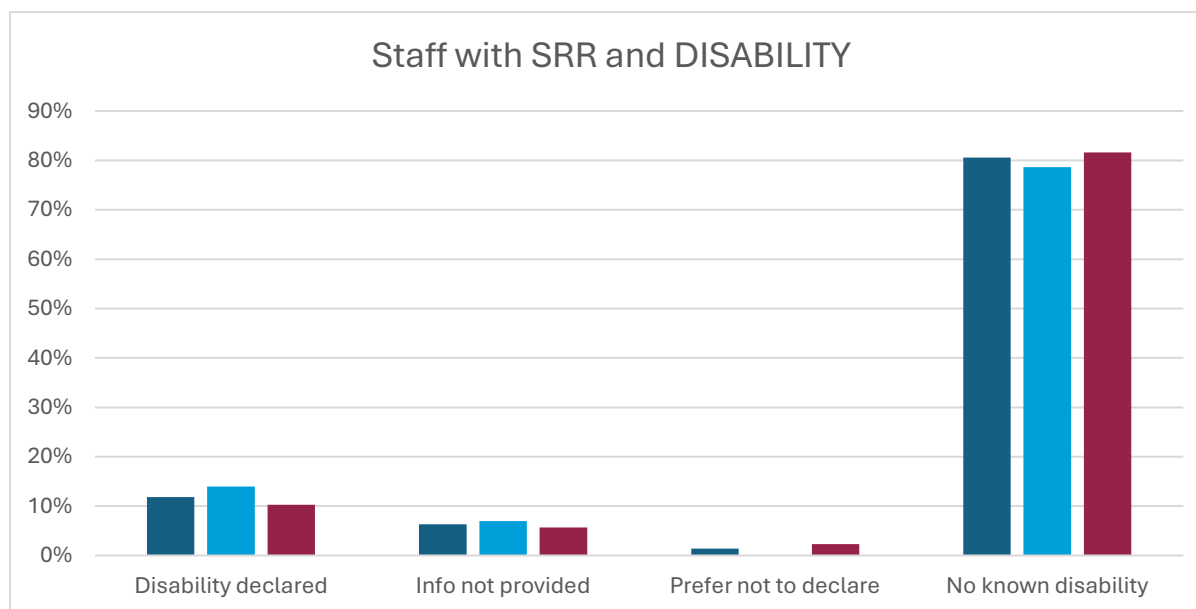
For the School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Sciences and UoA 20 (Social Work and Social Policy), there is better alignment between School and UoA. It is in the two youngest age categories where there is a dissimilarity: 1.8% and 7.0% of staff in the School are aged 0-25 and 26-35, respectively, but 7.7% and 0%, respectively, have been allocated to the UoA. If these two categories are taken together, the numbers are similar. In addition, low numbers overall distort these differences, as one staff member in a different age category in UoA 20 accounts for a shift in percentage by almost 8%. These numbers are arguably too low to tell us anything meaningful.

Finally, in the School of Sport Business and Media and UoA 24, the main area of concern is among the Over 60 category, whereas all staff with SRR in the other age groups are well represented. Staff over the age of 60 account for 15.2% of all staff in the School of Sport, Business and Media, but none are represented in the corresponding UoA 24 (Sport, Leisure and Tourism). This is an area for further consideration, especially since it reflects the overall university figures.

**MITIGATIONS AND FUTURE PRIORITIES:** It will remain important to consider analysis via the Academic Contribution Framework and associated governance group to ensure there are no inequitable differences in time allocated to academic development. Specific support approaches for academic staff in the Over 60 category generally may be beneficial, especially in Sport, Business and Media, and perhaps also for the 36-45 age category in Education. Marjon's emphasis on increasing support for early career researchers appears to be making positive changes, and the youngest age categories are better represented than during the previous REF; greater encouragement to access this provision for slightly older second-career ECRs may also be beneficial.

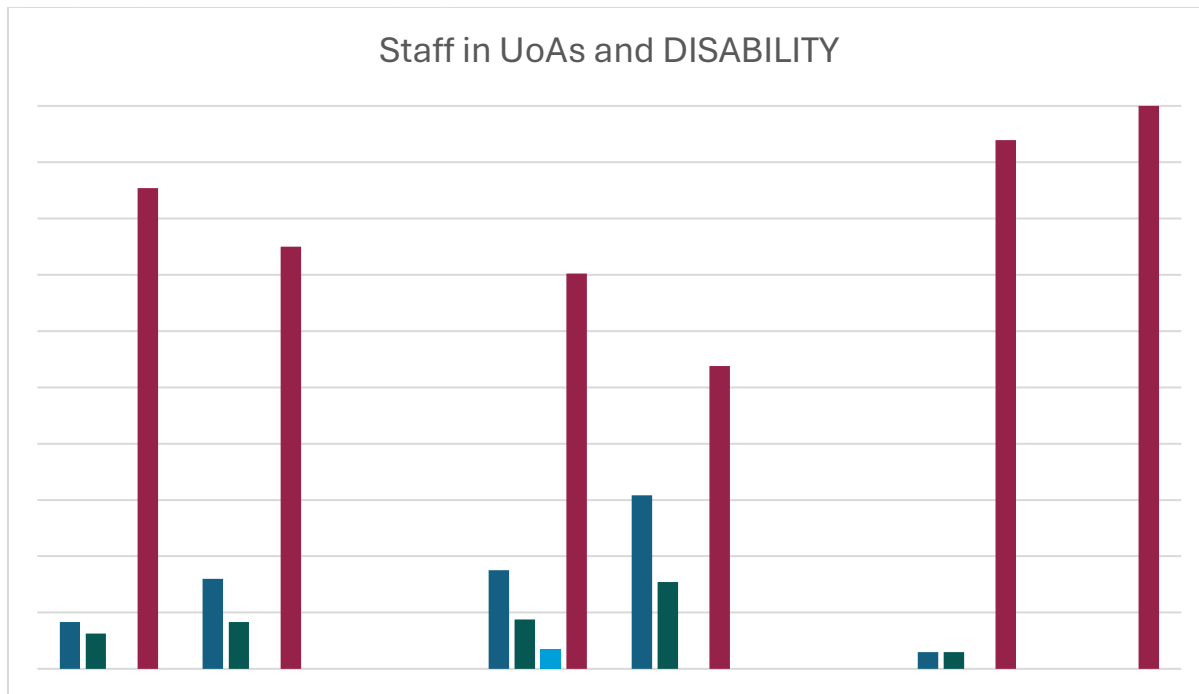
## Disability

**RISK:** Staff with a declared disability may be treated less favourably than those without when considering support for research, including allocation of time, funding schemes, research networks and external engagement. Staff with a declared disability may also have to overcome time-related challenges that can influence the rate of production of quality research. This may deny staff with a declared disability the opportunity to produce high quality research.



**Figure 3: Comparison of staff with SRR and DISABILITY**

**ANALYSIS:** Figure 3 compares the proportion of staff who have declared disability with SRR (14%) and the general academic staff population (11.8%), and Figure 4 compares disability within the UoAs Marjon will submit to REF 2029. These data suggest no bias against staff with disabilities. The only instance where disability is lower among staff included in the REF than among those not included is within the School of Sport, Business and Media and allocation to UoA 24 (Sport, Leisure and Tourism). However, it is unclear whether this is a genuine concern or the result of a small sample within a small institution, especially since staff with a declared disability are generally very well represented.

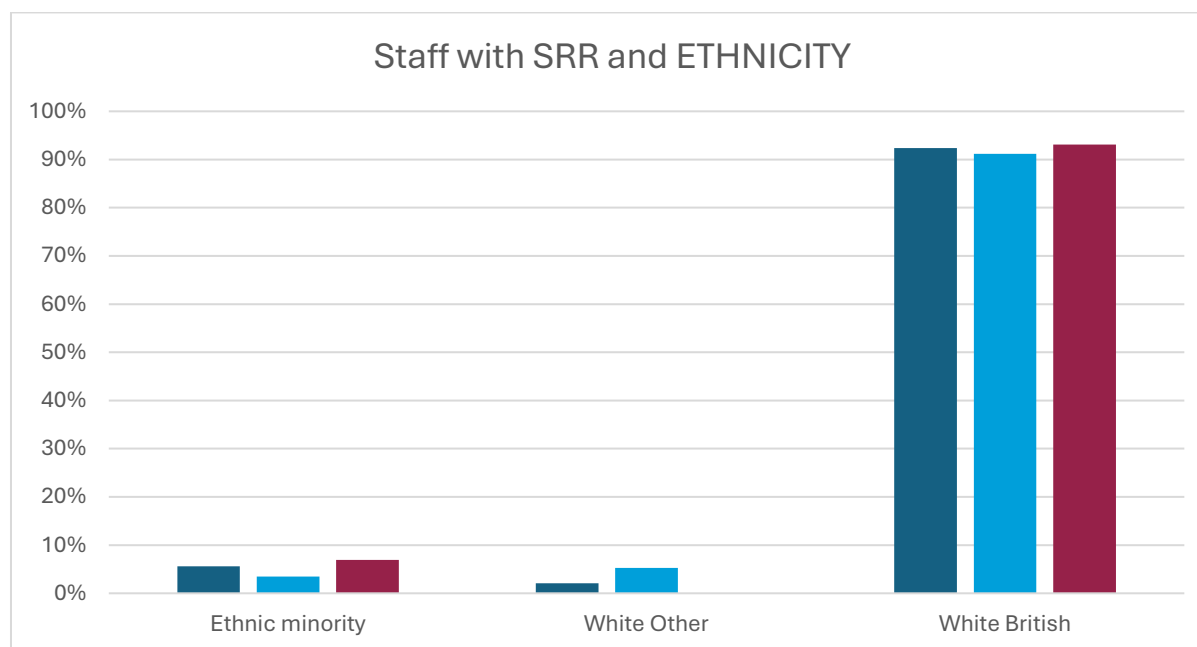


**Figure 4: Staff Allocation to UoAs and DISABILITY**

**FUTURE PRIORITIES:** Staff with a disability are generally well represented at Marjon, with what seems to be an increase in this category of staff taking part in the REF since the last cycle. Since then, a Disability Network has been established, with its first meeting in July 2025. It will remain important to continue to ensure there is no bias against staff with disabilities, perhaps with a focus on Sport, Business and Media.

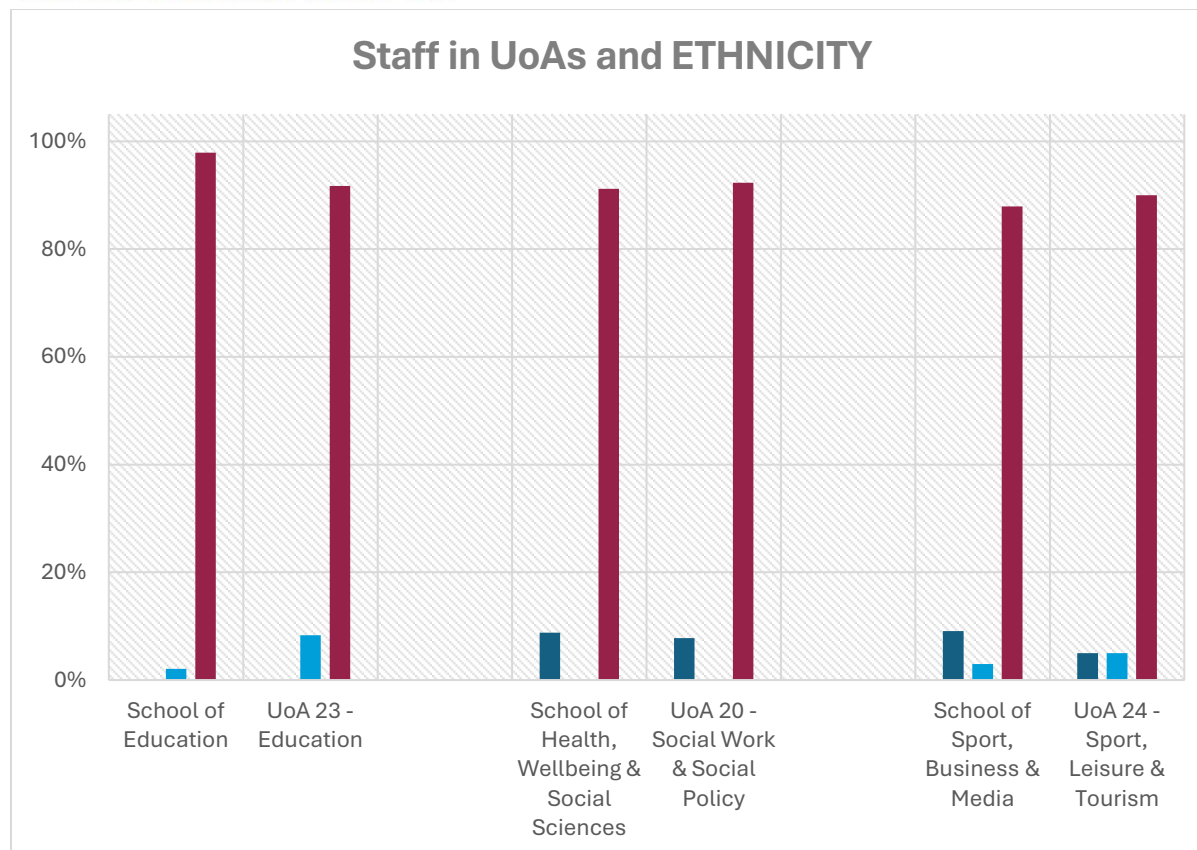
## Ethnicity

**RISK:** Staff from an ethnic minority may be treated less favourably considering support for research, including allocation of time, funding schemes, research networks and external engagement. Staff from an ethnic minority may also experience racial harassment and a lack of suitable research mentors due to lack of diversity in the sector. Furthermore, those from an ethnic minority and/or not British may lack familiarity with terminology and processes associated with research assessment in the UK context.



**Figure 5: Comparison of staff with SRR and ETHNICITY**

**ANALYSIS:** Figure 5 compares the proportion of staff with SRR whose ethnic origin is other than White British (8.8%) and the general academic staff population (8.7%). These numbers are similar; however, when divided between ethnic minorities and White non-British staff, there is a slight under-representation of ethnic minorities with SRR (3.5% compared with 5.6% of all academic staff). However, as the numbers of ethnic minorities are very small, they will be influenced by changes in staff composition of one or two people. It was not possible to separate out specific ethnicities for confidentiality reasons due to the low numbers.



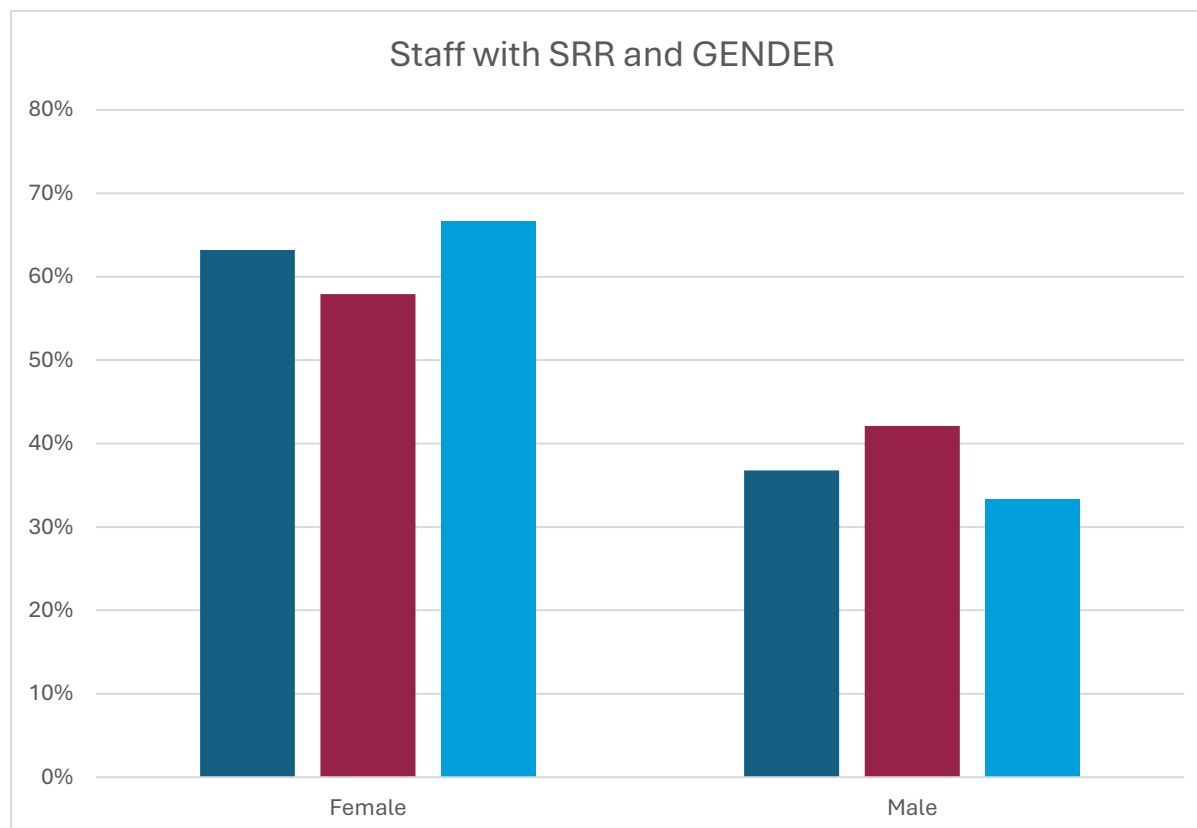
**Figure 6: Staff Allocation to UoAs and ETHNICITY**

**ANALYSIS:** Figure 6 compares ethnicity within the UoAs Marjon will submit to REF 2029. In UoA 23 (Education) and UoA 20 (Social Work and Social Policy), ethnic minorities and White non-British staff are well represented, and White non-British staff are also well represented in UoA 23 (Sport, Tourism and Leisure). There is a slight under-representation among ethnic minorities in UoA 23 (9.1% of staff in the School compared with 5.9% of staff with SRR in the UoA), although this may again be the result of a small sample.

**FUTURE PRIORITIES:** It will remain important to diversify our general staff profile. While the South West region has almost the lowest proportion of residents from an ethnic minority (2021 Census 6.9% – only Wales is lower), Marjon falls behind this and would aim to exceed our local demographic. This remains a key equality target for the university and the establishment of a Global Majority Staff Network is planned. Targeted mentoring for staff from an ethnic minority could help ensure that research pathway choices are considered where appropriate.

## Gender

**RISK:** Females may be treated less favourably than males when considering support for research including allocation of time, funding schemes, research networks and external engagement. This may deny females the opportunity to produce high-quality research. Females may also be less confident to select research in their academic development career pathway.



**Figure 7: Comparison of staff with SRR and GENDER**

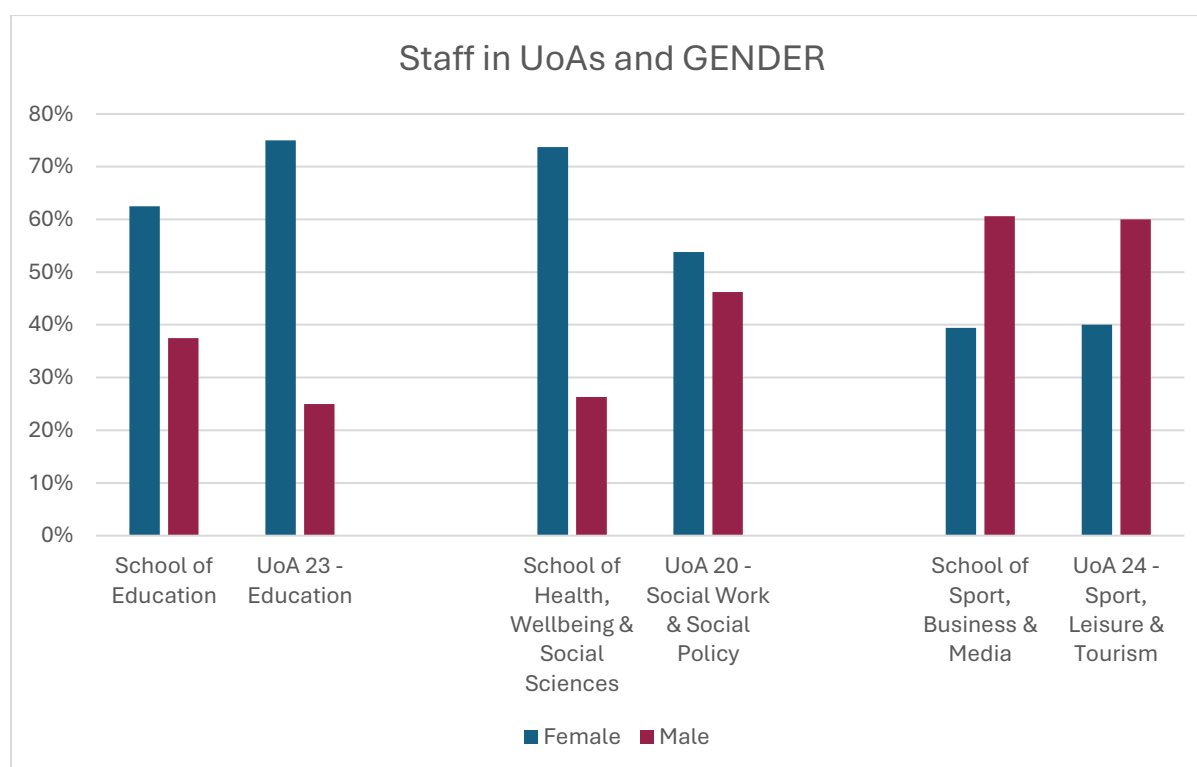
**ANALYSIS:** Figure 7 indicates that the proportion of female and male staff (57.9% / 42.1%) with SRR is fairly similar to the proportion for all academic staff (63.2% / 36.8%), albeit that female staff seem slightly under-represented. Figure 8 shows a more uneven picture. Representation of female staff in UoA 24 (Sport, Leisure and Tourism – 40%) from among all staff in the School of Sport, Business and Media (39.6%) is balanced, although the percentage of female staff within these disciplines is below the overall proportion of female staff university-wide (67%), representing a sector-wide issue. There is, however, a gender imbalance in allocation to the other two UoAs. In Education, female staff are over-represented in UoA 23 (75%) compared to the School (62.5%). For UoA 20 (Social Work and Social Policy), the opposite can be seen, with a lower proportion of female staff with SRR (53.8%) than there are in the School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Sciences (73.3%). This may be due to recent female

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appointments within our new Nursing provision, for which professional experience is necessarily prioritised over research.

The changes since REF 2021 are overall positive in terms of gender balance. In REF 2021, the overall proportion of female academics was 67% but only 53% were returned to the REF. This 14% gap has been reduced to approximately 5% at the time of this analysis. Similarly, representation within UoA 24 (Sport, Leisure and Tourism) has improved, with the gap closing from 9% (46% female staff in the School with 37% returned to UoA 24 in REF 2021) to zero gap. The main area for concern regarding female staff representation in REF is among staff in the School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Sciences (53.8%) and UoA 20 (Social Work and Social Policy – 73.7%), where the gap is 20%, and regarding male representation in Education, where the gap is 12.5%.



**Figure 8: Staff Allocation to UoAs and GENDER**

### MITIGATIONS:

Since REF 2021, much work has been undertaken at Marjon to secure a more balanced gender profile for Marjon's REF 2029 submission. Work towards an Athena Swan award has been successful; female staff have been engaging with Advance HE Aurora Women's Leadership Development programme; writing retreats, particularly popular among female academics, have been implemented; female professor research leaders have been appointed; and both a Women's Network and a Men's Network have been established, with monthly meetings. Mitigation against the process for SRR is not possible

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## Research Excellence Framework

since it is a self-selection process, although there is now increased guidance for line managers around supporting staff with decision-making around pathway choices.

**FUTURE PRIORITIES:** Gender equality remains an equality objective focus for Marjon in the most recent Annual Equality Report. Although overall there is a good balance in SRR between genders at Marjon, there is still room for further improvement, especially in supporting female academics to follow the research academic pathway in certain disciplines.

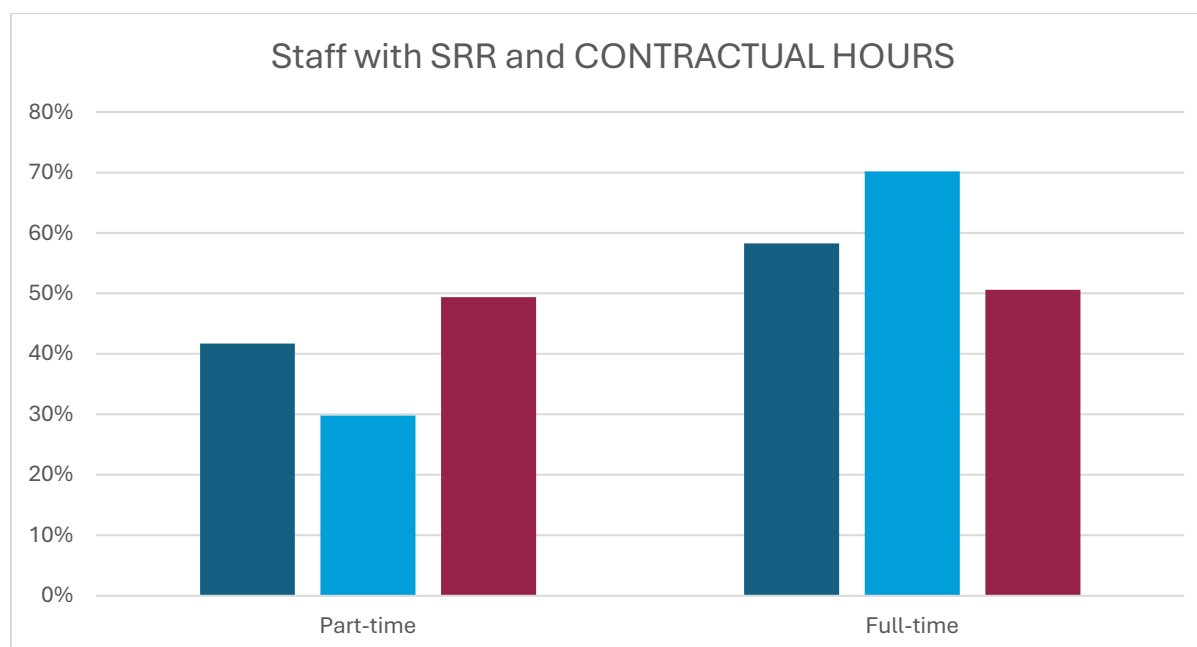
Continuing with writing retreats has been a priority, despite retrenchment in the sector due to financial pressures. In addition, a new research mentoring scheme is in place which will assist academics in developing research capacity. Much of this activity has been made possible through our success in REF 2021 and associated QR funding.

Further, our Athena Swan Action Plan 2025-2030 specifically cites 'promoting gender proportionality in external recruitment', 'enhance job design to attract a more balanced proportion of genders applying to posts, (especially for School of Health, Wellbeing & Social Sciences)' and 'applications for promotion by female staff to match that of male'. The Action Plan will develop 'next steps' for staff on the Aurora Women's programme to offer further development on completion, both for female participants themselves and to support others as mentors through the Women's Network.

It is clear sector-wide activity in Sport Science and Leisure Studies is required, and we will continue to encourage and support staff to influence PSRBs and learned societies alongside attempting to attract, support and retain female staff within this discipline.

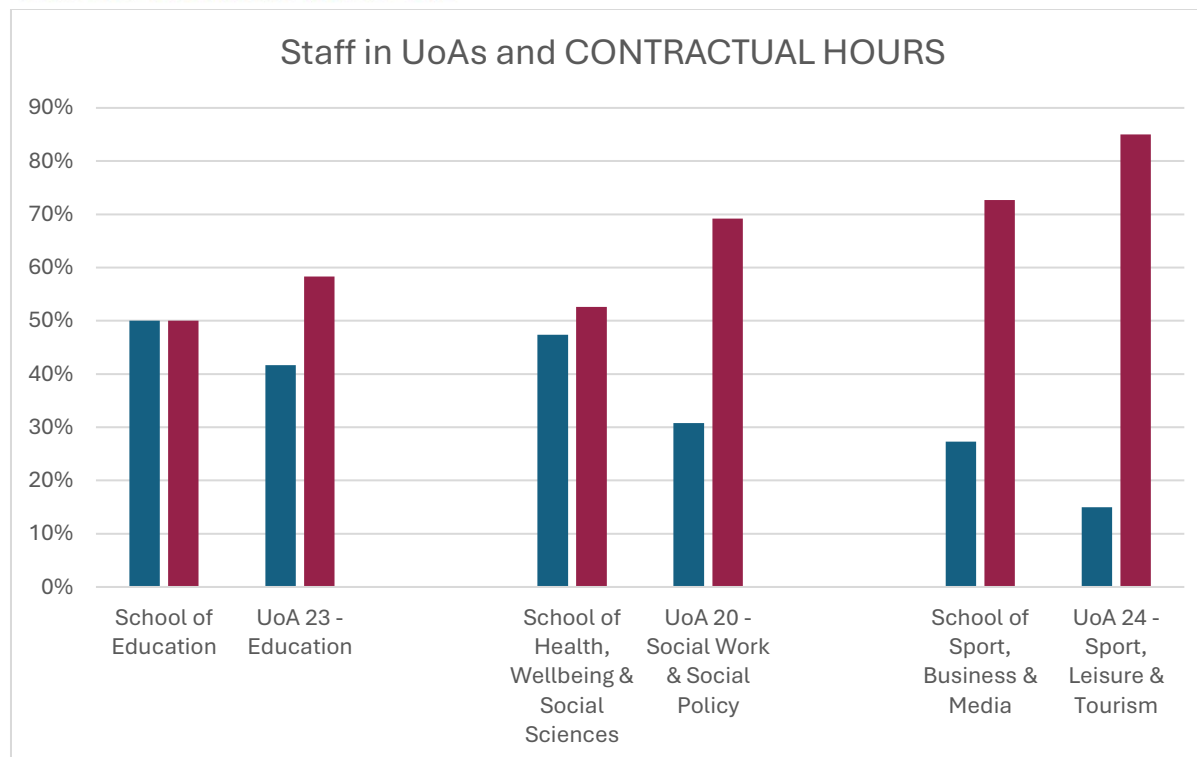
## Part-time working

**RISK:** Individuals who work part-time are unlikely to be able to commit as much time to research as their full-time colleagues and so cannot produce the same volume of research while maintaining a high standard. Employment Law makes it unlawful to discriminate against employees because they work part-time. Marjon has a flexible-working policy which sets out the expectations of staff not to discriminate or treat others unfavourably because they work part-time or flexibly.



**Figure 9: Comparison of staff with SRR and PART-TIME WORKING**

**ANALYSIS:** Figure 9 shows that the proportion of part-time staff with SRR (29.8%) is lower than their representation in the workforce (41.7%). This pattern is consistent with that observed in REF 2021 (37% vs 47%), indicating that the differential has remained relatively stable over time. This may be influenced by a range of factors, including the concentration of part-time staff in teaching-focused or professionally oriented roles, where research activity may not be the primary focus, as well as the potential impact of reduced contracted hours on capacity to undertake research. Further exploration of this issue would be useful to better understand the extent to which institutional processes or role expectations may contribute to this pattern.



**Figure 10: Staff Allocation to UoAs and PART-TIME WORKING**

A similar imbalance can be seen among part-time working staff among all three UoAs and all staff in the Schools in **Figure 10**, with the widest gap, of 16.6%, within the School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Sciences and UoA 20 (Social Work and Social Policy). This, too, merits further investigation.

**MITIGATIONS:** Significant efforts have been made to ensure that research seminars and researcher development workshops are offered on different days of the week to enable participation by part time staff. There are also twilight sessions and recordings of many events made available to allow staff to engage at a time which suits them. There remain challenges for part time staff around finding time for academic development and particularly for research which can require a significant commitment of time. However, work in collaborative groupings and clusters is strongly encouraged to enable all to contribute to research at a level which is proportionate to their contractual hours.

**FUTURE PRIORITIES:** Ongoing developments at Marjon are focusing on making resources and networks for research and knowledge exchange more accessible, and open to staff who work flexible or fractional hours. An online site will draw resources and CPD opportunities together. Further guidance for line managers on supporting academic development of part time staff will be provided to ensure consistent consideration of part-time working patterns and avoidance of bias. Ongoing data monitoring of HESA data and contract type will enable us to track impacts over time.

## Religion or belief

**RISK:** An individual's ability to undertake research during the REF assessment period may be constrained by complications arising from harassment due to religious belief. Some religious beliefs may impact on the ability to engage in research at specific times and/or on specific topics, which could inhibit their ability to engage with established research programmes.

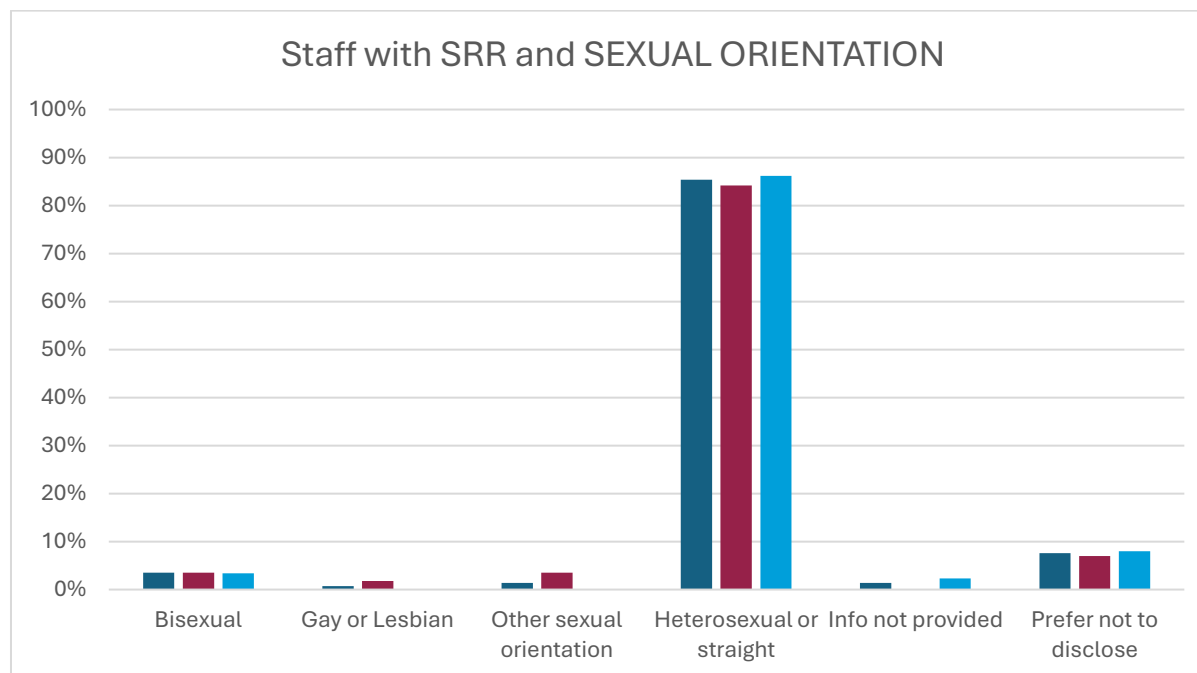


**Figure 11: Comparison of staff with SRR and RELIGION**

**ANALYSIS:** Figure 11 illustrates religious belief data in relation to HESA categories and therefore compares the proportion of staff from Christian, any other religion or belief, no religion or belief, prefer not to disclose and not provided. Other religious beliefs had insufficient numbers to include. The data do not suggest any specific religious belief has inhibited access to research or has restricted this choice of pathway. It appears that fewer people without a religion or belief have SRR (29.8%) in comparison to the academic population (40.3%), although why this may be is not clear. A positive change since REF 2021 is that the number who 'prefer not to disclose' has reduced from 10% to 2.8%.

## Sexual orientation

**RISK:** An individual's ability to undertake research during the REF assessment period may be constrained by complications arising from harassment relating to their sexual orientation.



**Figure 12: Comparison of staff with SRR and SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

**ANALYSIS:** Figure 12 indicates that there is a fairly mixed group of staff with SRR in terms of sexual orientation, with no under-representation among staff who identified as anything other than heterosexual. The data do not suggest that any sexual orientation has inhibited access to research or has restricted this choice of pathway. However, total numbers for each of the categories outside heterosexual are very small, and as such little can be inferred from the analysis.

**FUTURE PRIORITIES:** The University is committed to ensuring diversity among its community, and what appears to be good representation among Marjon staff who will be included in the REF is an indication of such commitment. One concrete example of this is an LGBTQ+ Network being established to support these groups.

## Conclusions and next steps

The analysis suggests that, based on 2024-25 HESA data, our REF 2029 submission will be inclusive and broadly representative of our academic community. There is little to suggest that any particular group will be discriminated against unduly. The key risk areas in terms of equality, the processes for identifying staff with SRR and allocation to UoAs are largely appropriately mitigated. Overall, academic staff have reflected positively on the processes for preparing and transparency of the Marjon REF submission and the philosophy of utilising the submission as a learning opportunity was well received.

Once data are available, the EIA will be updated to examine whether any staff groups are under-represented in the final output pool and whether structural inequalities (e.g., access to authorship or research time) might have influenced these results. Details of any appeals and a breakdown of the demographic background of appellants will also be added when available.

## Action Plan

### 1. Governance and Iterative Review

- **Action:** Conduct regular reviews of the EIA to ensure it remains a "live document" that informs decision-making rather than merely documenting it retrospectively.
- **Timeline:** Next iteration (Version 2) to be completed by December 2026, following analysis of HESA data for 2025-26.
- **Responsibility:** Dean of Research and Knowledge Exchange, supported by the REF Steering Group.
- **Monitoring:** The Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee will receive regular reports on the impact of mitigations and progress against this Action Plan.

### 2. Output Selection and Inclusivity

- **Action:** Perform a quantitative analysis of the selected output pool once the review process is complete (currently in progress).
- **Focus:** Compare the characteristics of staff whose outputs are selected against the wider academic population to identify any potential bias in the selection criteria, such as an over-reliance on metrics or specific publication venues.
- **Mitigation:** If disparities are identified, the REF Steering Group will review selection protocols to ensure preference is given to outputs that improve the inclusivity of the submission.

### 3. Appeals Process and Accessibility

- **Action:** Implement a clear communication strategy for the internal appeals mechanism related to SRR and Research Independence (RI) to ensure no staff groups are unaware of this option.
- **Analysis:** Conduct a detailed review of appeal rates across different demographics. This will include an analysis of the reasons for appeals and whether they were upheld, partially upheld, or rejected.
- **Goal:** Ensure the appeals process is transparent, impartial, and responsive to equality-related concerns, removing any accessibility barriers (e.g., language, disability, or caring responsibilities).

## 4. Intersectionality and Targeted Support

- **Action:** Integrate a focus on intersectionality in future EIA versions (where possible – in some cases, small numbers may make this problematic) to identify where overlapping characteristics (e.g., gender and race, or disability and contract status) create unique barriers to research participation.
- **Mitigations:** Continue existing successes such as writing retreats, the Aurora Women's Leadership programme, and the establishment of staff networks (Global Majority, Disability, LGBTQ+, Women's, and Men's Networks).

## 5. Diversifying the Research Community

- **Action:** Address the lower proportions of part-time staff engaging in research by providing targeted guidance for line managers on supporting their academic development.
- **Diversity Targets:** Proactively work to increase the diversity of the academic staff population, specifically aiming to exceed local regional averages for ethnic minorities and achieving gender balance in each discipline.