



Scottish Funding Council

Promoting further and higher education

Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

A' brosnachadh foghlam adhartach agus àrd ìre

Circular

Research Excellence Framework – reviewing codes of practice

25 November 2011

SFC/24/2011

http://www.sfc.ac.uk/news_events_circulars/Circulars/circulars_page.aspx

The purpose of this circular is to inform heads of institutions of arrangements for reviewing codes of practice for the selection of staff for the Research Excellence Framework.

FAO: Principals and directors of Scotland's universities

Contact: Pauline Jones, Senior Policy Officer, Research and Innovation, Tel: 0131 313 6631, email: pjones@sfc.ac.uk

Recent SFC documents

18 November 2011

SFC/23/2011

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28 October 2011

SFC/22/2011

The 2011-12 HEI Early Statistics Return

21 October 2011

SFC/21/2011

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30 September 2011

SFC/20/2011

Student support: announcement of clawback of 2009-10 funds and in-year management of 2011-12 funds

12 August 2011

SFC/19/2011

Research excellence grant: updating other activity indicators

15 July 2011

SFC/18/2011

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8 July 2011

SFC/17/2011

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8 July 2011

SFC/16/2011

New arrangements for higher education institutions' reporting of knowledge exchange activity and outcomes

Research Excellence Framework – reviewing codes of practice

Purpose

- 1 This circular explains the Scottish Funding Council's (SFC's) arrangements for reviewing codes of practice on the fair and transparent selection of staff for submission to the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF2014).
- 2 These arrangements were agreed by the SFC Board in November and have also been agreed by the higher education (HE) funding bodies for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, who are writing to their own institutions in similar terms.

Background

- 3 The REF 'Assessment framework and guidance on submissions' (REF 02.2011, available at <http://www.ref.ac.uk>), which the REF team published in June, requires that each university or other higher education institution (HEI) submitting to the REF develops, documents and applies a code of practice on the fair and transparent selection of staff for REF submissions. To support universities in meeting their own obligations in law, the REF team also gave detailed guidance (in [REF 02.2011](#)) on drawing up codes of practice: that guidance provides a common framework for institutions' development of policies and procedures within the REF, but does not generate obligations beyond those that universities will in any case need to address. It is the responsibility of universities to ensure that their codes of practice, and the manner in which they participate in the REF, are lawful.
- 4 The REF requirements, and associated guidance, have been developed following advice from a specially convened Equality and Diversity Advisory Group which includes members from the Equality Challenge Unit.

Reviewing codes of practice

- 5 Each institution must submit its code of practice to the REF team no later than **Tuesday 31 July 2012** and the funding bodies will publish all codes of practice alongside REF submissions at the conclusion of the exercise. If we need to ask an institution to amend its code of practice, we will publish the resubmitted code at the conclusion of the exercise. We will write in August 2012 to the head of any institution that does not submit a code of practice by **Tuesday 31 July 2012** to

acknowledge the institution's decision not to submit a code and to confirm the institution's ineligibility to submit to REF2014.

- 6 The REF team is also offering an earlier optional submission date of **27 April 2012** for those institutions whose code of practice is ready for earlier submission and who wish to receive earlier confirmation from SFC that their code meets the REF published requirements. Institutions may only submit their code of practice once; the earlier deadline is not an opportunity to gain feedback to inform further development of the code.
- 7 Paragraphs 11 to 14 explain the process that we will follow for reviewing each code of practice and how we will liaise with an institution if its code does not meet the published requirements. The timetables we will follow for submissions made by **31 July 2012** and for the earlier optional deadline of **27 April 2012** are as follows. All dates are for 2012 unless otherwise stated.

Action	(Optional) April deadline	July deadline
Institution submits code of practice to REF team	By 27 April	By 31 July
SFC notifies institution that code of practice meets REF requirements; or requests resubmission of the code of practice	By 6 July	By 12 October
Institution resubmits code of practice to SFC	By 3 August	By 9 November
SFC notifies institution that code of practice meets REF requirements; or requests a second resubmission of the code of practice	By 28 September	By 4 January 2013
Institution resubmits code of practice to SFC	By 5 October	By 11 January 2013
SFC notifies institution whether or not code of practice meets REF requirements	By 19 October	By 25 January 2013

- 8 The timetables are intended to allow:
- sufficient time for scrutiny of all institutions' codes of practice;
 - adequate time for revision of codes by institutions if this is required by us; and
 - a minimum 10-month period between us agreeing that a code of practice meets the REF published requirements and the actual REF submission deadline.
- 9 The timetables indicate the latest dates that we expect to respond to institutions at each stage in the process; if only a few cases require liaison with institutions we will aim to respond more quickly.

Process

- 10 The four HE funding bodies have agreed that all codes of practice submitted to REF2014 will be reviewed against the requirements set out in REF 02.2011, initially by a newly convened REF Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel (EDAP). The EDAP will provide advice to the REF team, REF panel chairs and the UK funding bodies on implementing the REF equality and diversity measures, particularly during the assessment phase. It comprises experts from the sector and members of REF panels. Its terms of reference and membership will be available before the end of this year on the REF website at: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/equality/>
- 11 The EDAP will advise the funding bodies on the adherence of institutions' codes of practice to the REF guidance. Thereafter each funding body, rather than the REF team, will liaise with its institutions directly.
- 12 Following either submission deadline, and taking account of the EDAP's advice, if we judge that a code of practice meets the REF published requirements, we will advise the head of institution of this within 11 weeks.
- 13 If a code of practice does not meet the published requirements:
- a. We will write within 11 weeks to inform the head of the institution of exactly the nature of the shortcomings and what needs to be done to comply with the requirements.
 - b. We will ask the institution to address this feedback and to submit to SFC within four weeks:
 - i. a revised code of practice; and

- ii. a description of how the institution has or will communicate to its staff and implement any necessary changes in its procedures in the period before it finalises its REF submission.
 - c. We will then review the revised code of practice and within eight weeks from the date of re-submission either:
 - i. advise the head of institution that the revised code has met the REF published requirements; or
 - ii. advise the head of institution and the chair of the board of governors that the code still does not satisfy the published requirements, and explain what needs to be done to satisfy them.
 - d. We will ask the institution to address this new feedback and to submit to SFC within one week:
 - i. a newly revised code of practice; and
 - ii. a description of how the institution has or will communicate to its staff and implement any necessary changes in its procedures in the period before it finalises its REF submission.
 - e. We will review the newly revised code of practice and within two weeks from the date of its submission will advise the head of institution whether or not the newly revised code has met the REF published requirements.
 - f. If an institution's code of practice still does not meet the REF published requirements after two attempts by us to help it to do so, we reserve the right to inform the institution that it is ineligible to enter the REF2014. In this case, we would write to notify the head of institution and chair of the board of governors as soon as reasonably possible, subject to any further advice we may need to take.
- 14 Our guidance on codes of practice and the process of approval are designed to help ensure that we and the other three HE funding bodies conduct the REF in accordance with our duties under the Equality Act 2010. Institutions have their own legal obligations and it is the

responsibility of institutions to ensure that their codes of practice and the manner in which they participate in the REF are lawful.

Next steps

- 15 Please acknowledge receipt of this letter by email to Pauline Jones pjones@sfc.ac.uk by **Thursday 22 December 2011**.

Further information

- 16 Please contact: Pauline Jones, Senior Policy Officer, Research and Innovation, Tel: 0131 313 6631, email: pjones@sfc.ac.uk.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MTS Batho', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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