

EIA on University of Westminster's policy and procedures for identifying staff with research independence

1. Introduction

The objective of this EIA is to monitor and provide information on how the University's policy and processes for identifying staff with research independence, as set out in our [REF Code of Practice](#) (section 3), may have impacted on equality and diversity in our submission to REF2021, with the aim of ensuring that our processes support colleagues from protected groups to participate fully in REF. The EIA is the responsibility of the University REF E&D group which reports to the REF2021 Sub-committee.

2. Background

From our inception, the University of Westminster has provided an environment and culture committed to the principles of equality, diversity and inclusivity. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group, established in 2018-19, has continued to work through and with our established Colleague networks to manage and implement the University's EDI Action Plan.

The Research Excellence Framework is conducted by Research England on behalf of the UK higher education funding bodies. The REF informs the selective allocation of QR funding, provides public evidence of the benefits of research investment and supports the establishment of standards of research quality. The REF is organized into 34 subject sub-panels or units of assessment, of which the University of Westminster submitted to 13. Institutions make submissions at Unit level. For REF2021 there is also a pilot excise where institutions submit an institutional level environment statement to provide contextual information.

The procedural framework for the University's submission to REF2021 is set out in our Code of Practice and was developed with support from staff and with the agreement of UCU. Policy and processes are set out in such a way as to apply equally to all academic colleagues. Those individuals at the University of Westminster involved in REF2021 decision-making processes are expected to be fully conversant with equal opportunities issues and the legislative environment and its implications for the REF, and undertook appropriate mandatory training on equality and diversity principles. Specific guidance on how such principles relate to REF policies and procedures were also provided through in-person workshops, and all staff in decision-making roles were asked to commit to running a fair and transparent process. All colleagues in the University are also required to complete a mandatory Equality and Diversity Essentials e-Learning Module, which aims to raise awareness and knowledge of diversity issues across the University and to ensure commitment to embracing diversity and promoting equality.

3. Scope

The policy and processes covered by this EIA are detailed in Section 3: Determining research independence in the University's Code of Practice. Colleagues affected by this policy are those on research only contracts. In line with the Code of Practice, all staff on research only contracts were identified as either independent researchers or not independent researchers for the purpose of REF2021. This review is being carried out to identify ensure that staff with particular protected characteristics were not unfairly discriminated against in this determination of research independence for the purposes of the University's REF2021 submission.

Before our REF2021 Code of Practice was finalised, initial draft EIAs on projected staff submission to REF were undertaken. Further EIAs were undertaken, following the adoption of the Code of Practice, in March 2019 and March 2020 as the Code was implemented. This EIA has been carried out on the final identification of those research only staff determined as having research independence or not on the REF census date of July 31st 2020.

The EIA considers the protected characteristics listed below. In addition, information on full-time or part-time contract status has been included.

- Age
- Ethnicity/race
- Sex
- gender re-assignment
- Disability
- Sexual orientation
- Religion or belief
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity, adoption and shared parental leave

4. Analyses

Chi squared analysis of each protected staff characteristic and part-time/full-time status revealed that, apart from age, there was no significant difference across the characteristics ($p < 0.05$) in terms of staff who were identified as Research Independent. For age, staff in the 25-34 age range were significantly less likely to be identified as research independent while staff in the 55-64 age range were significantly more likely to be identified as independent. Analysis of job descriptions for colleagues early in their research careers suggests that they are less likely to be working as independent researchers as they have often not yet built up the range of skills and experience that support working independently in such roles.

	Degrees of freedom	N	Chi-squared	Significance
Age	5	23	14.06	$p > 0.05$
Ethnicity	3	23	1.85	$p < 0.05$

	Degrees of freedom	N	Chi-squared	Significance
Gender	1	23	0.09	p<0.05
Disability	1	23	0.10	p<0.05
Sexual Orientation	5	23	4.07	p<0.05
Religion or Belief	7	23	11.12	p<0.05
Marital Status	5	23	3.21	p<0.05
Status (PT/FT)	1	23	0.55	p<0.05

5. Conclusions

The determination of research independence for research only staff resulted in a submission to REF2021 that was broadly in line with the overall proportions of staff with protected characteristics on research only contracts in the University. The EIA did not identify significant differences, between independent and not independent researchers, across characteristics surveyed, with the exception of age. Similarly, differences in rates of submission to REF, across staff characteristics, were not statistically significant, with the exception of age. Nonetheless, the University recognises that it is important to explore further any divergence in rates of submission between different groups (defined here as characteristics) and to monitor and embed the equality and diversity within all our processes.

6. Action plan

The outcomes of the EIA will be shared with and discussed with the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group and Research Committee, and with staff representatives of early and mid-career researchers and research only staff via the University's Researcher Development Working Group, as well as with staff networks (including the BME Network, Q+ Network and Women of Westminster network). The University continues to work to advance Equality, Diversity and Inclusion through its University EDI Action Plan and to support staff in developing research independence through initiatives and programmes linked to our ongoing Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers commitment and ongoing action plan.

7. EIA data

Equalities Denominator	No. of research only colleagues identified as independent researchers	% of research only colleagues identified as independent researchers	No. of research only colleagues in the University	% of research only colleagues in the University
Age				
16-24	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
25-34	≤5	Too small to disclose	21	32.81%
35-44	7	30.43%	20	31.25%
45-54	≤5	Too small to disclose	8	12.50%
55-64	7	30.43%	9	14.06%
65 and over	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Ethnicity				
BME	≤5	Too small to disclose	12	18.75%
Information Refused	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Unknown	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
White	19	82.61%	47	73.44%
Gender				
Female	9	39.13%	27	42.19%
Male	14	60.87%	37	57.81%
Gender Re-assignment				
Yes	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Disability				
No	20	86.96%	57	89.06%
Prefer not to say	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Yes	≤5	13.04%	7	10.94%
Sexual Orientation				
Bisexual	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	1.56%
Gay Man	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Gay Woman / Lesbian	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Heterosexual/St raight	12	52.17%	44	68.75%

Equalities Denominator	No. of research only colleagues identified as independent researchers	% of research only colleagues identified as independent researchers	No. of research only colleagues in the University	% of research only colleagues in the University
Sexual Orientation				
Other	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Prefer not to say	≤5	Too small to disclose	6	9.38%
Unknown	7	30.43%	11	17.19%
Religion or Belief				
Buddhist	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Christian	≤5	Too small to disclose	12	18.75%
Hindu	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Jewish	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Muslim	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
No Religion	9	39.13%	24	37.50%
Other	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Prefer not to say	≤5	8.70%	7	10.94%
Sikh	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Spiritual	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Unknown	9	39.13%	13	20.31%
Marital Status				
Civil Partnership	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Cohabiting	≤5	Too small to disclose	10	15.63%
Divorced	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Married	11	47.83%	24	37.50%
Separated	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Single	7	30.43%	21	32.81%
Unknown	≤5	Too small to disclose	7	10.94%
Widow	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Widower	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose

Equalities Denominator	No. of research only colleagues identified as independent researchers	% of research only colleagues identified as independent researchers	No. of research only colleagues in the University	% of research only colleagues in the University
Maternity, Adoption & Shared Parental Leave				
Yes	≤5	Too small to disclose	≤5	Too small to disclose
Status				
Full-time	9	39.13%	30	46.88%
Part-time	14	60.87%	34	53.13%