

Oxford Brookes University REF2021 Equality Impact Assessment

Introduction

Since 2017/18 the university has carried out a series of interim equality impact assessments (EIAs) to explore whether the university procedures for identification of staff with significant responsibility for research (SRR), identification of research independence and output selection disproportionately affected staff with particular protected characteristics. This equality impact assessment reviews and summarises those interim EIAs as well as the analysis of the final REF2021 submission, based on staff data as at 31 July 2020. Its aim is to highlight any changes that have taken place since the initial EIA and to consider whether there is any evidence of disproportionality in the final submission. It will consider what learning from this exercise should be taken forward.

This assessment is prepared by Human Resources for the REF2021 Steering Group.

Background

Oxford Brookes is committed to enhancing equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation. Equalities work at Brookes is overseen by the EDI Advisory Group, chaired by the vice-chancellor. We have held an institutional Athena Swan bronze award since 2012, with the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences holding a silver award and the faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences and Technology, Design and Environment holding bronze awards. Our Race Equality Strategy puts race equality at the forefront and sets out the objectives and activities that we believe will ready us for a submission to the Equality Challenge Unit for the Race Equality Charter by 2025. We also engage with Aurora, Stonewall and Disability Confident, as well as supporting research staff through our commitment to the Concordat.

From early REF2021 preparations, EDI considerations have been central and we have sought to ensure at all stages that our policies and procedures are fair and equitable. Our Code of Practice details the steps that were taken throughout the planning and implementation stages:

- During 2017/18 our proposed mechanism to identify significant responsibility for research and research independence using our workload planning (WLP) system was extensively tested and audited with a wide range of stakeholders.
- A Code of Practice Working Group was established to develop the Code of Practice, which was designed to ensure that the university adhered to the principles of transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity. The draft code was consulted upon extensively, with all staff being invited to give feedback. The final draft was agreed by the University Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee and the Vice-Chancellor's Group.
- A training programme was developed and delivered to ensure that staff understood the REF requirements and how WLP allocations affected REF status, including identification of staff with significant responsibility for research, identification of research independence and output selection. Equality considerations were a key feature of this training programme, ensuring that staff who would be making decisions understood the legal obligations upon them as well as best practice for making fair and equitable decisions. This tied in with a

wider unconscious bias training programme that the university rolled out for all staff in 2019.

- The Code of Practice sets out roles and responsibilities for decision making, ensuring that appropriate structures and governance are in place. This includes a formal appeals process that explains how staff who are concerned about their WLP research allocation can raise their concerns.

Scope

Interim EIAs have been carried out at key points throughout the process, looking at the procedures for identification of staff with SRR, identification of independent researchers and output selection. These have been data-based exercises looking for statistically significant differences. These analyses have considered all protected characteristics for which sufficient data exists: gender, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion/belief. Gender reassignment is excluded due to the small numbers of staff who have told us that their gender is not the same as that assigned at birth. We do not collect data on marriage/civil partnership so that is not included. As well as protected characteristics, we have also analysed the data by contractual status, looking at full- and part-time working and permanent and fixed-term contracts from 2018/19 onwards.

The procedure for determining whether staff have significant responsibility is analysed by comparing staff with SRR with both all academic staff and with REF-eligible academic staff. Data for each protected characteristic is analysed for the whole organisation and by faculty. Where there are sufficient numbers of people with different characteristics data is also analysed by unit of assessment so that the effects of differences in staff composition in different parts of the organisation are taken into account. All differences are tested for statistical significance and are considered to be significant if the p-value is less than 0.05.

The nature of our academic terms and conditions of employment mean that there are very few academic staff who are not potentially REF-eligible as more than 95% of our academic staff are employed on either teaching and research or research only contracts. Therefore we have only commented separately on staff with SRR in the context of all academic staff and staff with SRR in the context of REF-eligible academic staff where there are significant differences between the two analyses.

The procedure for identifying independent researchers is analysed by comparing independent researchers with other research staff in the same grades. Our grades 8 and 9 (HESA level K0) are the only grades in which both independent and non-independent researchers are found. Therefore we have compared research staff at those levels.

Output selection is analysed by calculating the average number of outputs for staff from minority groups is compared with that from non-minority groups to identify any statistically significant differences. The average number of outputs is analysed across the whole institution and at faculty and Unit of Assessment (UoA) level.

Our initial EIA was carried out in November 2018 looking at 2017/18 staff data as it stood at that time. It examined data on identification of staff with SRR across the whole organisation and at faculty level. The second assessment was carried out in April 2019 looking at 2018/19 staff data. This expanded on the first assessment to include analysis at department and UoA level. As well as

updating the SRR analysis, this assessment looked at the procedure for deciding research independence and analysed the diversity profile of staff in decision-making roles as identified in the Code of Practice, comparing this with the academic staff population to examine how fully the diversity of academic staff was represented. We carried out a further EIA in December 2019 looking at SRR and research independence using the interim 2019/20 staff data. Now that the final submission population is confirmed we have carried out a final analysis of these procedures based on the data as at 31 July 2020 from the 2019/20 HESA return. All assessments use the full-person equivalent measure of headcount.

We have also carried out separate analyses looking at selection of outputs as data on this area has become available. The first was undertaken in January 2020. This was repeated in November 2020 and the final output data was analysed in March 2021.

All of these analyses have been submitted to the REF2021 Steering Group and Athena Swan Steering Group for consideration.

Analyses

Overall our initial analysis found that the data did not indicate that staff with particular characteristics were disproportionately affected by our procedures and subsequent EIAs have supported this conclusion. We have not seen significant changes throughout the period in which we have been conducting EIAs. Our observations are summarised here and the final analysis is appended to this document.

Gender

Analysis of gender have consistently found that across the whole organisation men are statistically more likely to have SRR for research than women. However, analysis at UoA has consistently revealed no statistically significant differences. The observed differences at higher levels are driven by uneven representation of men and women in different subject areas, particularly the fact that women are overrepresented in our two largest UoA (UoA3 and UoA17) that have significantly lower REF-submission rates than the rest of the organisation. Whilst this is something that we seek to address via wider organisational initiatives, particularly driven by the Athena Swan Steering Group, it does not indicate that our REF policies and procedures are unfair.

Ethnicity

Our analyses have consistently shown that the REF submission rates for white and BAME staff are equal. BAME staff have repeatedly been more likely to have SRR than white staff in several UoAs and there have been no UoAs in which white staff are significantly more likely to have SRR than BAME staff.

Disability

Each EIA has found that staff who have declared a disability are less likely to be selected for REF submission than staff who have told us that they do not have a disability. This occurs at both institutional and faculty/directorate level. However, no statistically significant differences have been found. The number of staff who have told us that they have a disability in individual UoAs has been too small to enable meaningful analysis at that level.

Age

The modal age group for academic staff is 45-54 and over 80% of academic staff are aged 35-64. Therefore for the purposes of this analysis we have compared staff aged under 35 and over 64 with the 35-64 age group. We have consistently found that across the whole institution staff aged under 35 are significantly less likely to be selected for REF submission than staff aged 35-64. The same trend has been observed in the Faculty of Technology, Design and Environment and in the final assessment was observed in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences. However, these differences are caused by the fact that staff aged under 35 are over represented in lower graded roles that do not include independent research. When these variables are accounted for there are no significant differences.

EIAs have consistently shown that in the majority of UoAs there are no significant differences. Although each EIA has found one or two significant differences at UoA level, no UoAs have seen recurring significant differences. When other variables such as role type are taken into account there are no significant differences.

Sexual orientation

We have repeatedly found that staff who have told us that they are LGB are at least as likely to have SRR for research as staff who have told us that they are heterosexual. The number of LGB staff in individual UoAs is too small to enable analysis at that level.

Religion/belief

The final analysis revealed that 35% of academic staff have told us that they have no religion, 31% have told us that they are Christian and 9% have told us that they have a different religion or belief. We have consistently found that the only significant differences are between staff who have told us that they are Christian and staff who have told us that they have no religion. The same trend is observed across the whole organisation and in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences.

Analysis at UoA level has not revealed any consistent statistically significant differences. It has been noted that there is considerable variation in religion/belief profile between UoAs and this can contribute to observed differences when aggregated data is analysed.

Pregnancy/maternity

The majority of our analyses comparing staff who took maternity leave starting on or after 01 August 2015 with those who did not, revealed no statistically significant differences. The final analysis initially showed that staff in the Faculty of Technology, Design and Environment who took maternity leave were significantly less likely to be selected for REF2021 submission than those who did not. However, this difference only occurred when analysing all academic staff in the faculty; there was no significant difference when comparing against the REF eligible pool only. When role type was taken into account there were no significant differences.

Contractual status – part-time working

We have repeatedly found that across the whole organisation and at faculty level part-time staff are significantly less likely to have SRR than full-time staff. This has been monitored closely both to ensure that part-time staff are not treated less favourably and because it is known that research activity is linked to promotions. Our final analysis shows the same differences at organisation and faculty level. However, analysis at UoA level reveals that in most UoAs part-time staff are not

significantly less likely to be included in the REF submission than full-time staff. Two of the three UoAs in which significant differences are found are our largest UoAs and also those in which the percentage of staff who are REF-submitted is much lower than the organisational average. This points to a different model of activity in those UoA. Overall the available data does not indicate that part-time staff are treated less favourably than their full-time colleagues.

Contractual status – fixed-term employment

Our analyses have revealed some statistically significant differences between fixed-term and permanent staff. Initially this was seen across the whole organisation as well as in some faculties and some UoAs. Now that the submission is finalised there are some significant differences in UoA level but not at faculty level or across the whole institution. We have consistently found that when grade and job function are taken into account there are no significant differences.

Research independence

Analyses of research staff in the grades in which both independent and non-independent researchers are found has not revealed any consistently occurring differences that are statistically significant. When we have found significant differences, these have not been found when grade/role type are taken into account.

Output selection

The final analysis of the average number of outputs by protected characteristic shows that, at institutional level, there are no statistically significant differences by gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, full/part-time status or permanent/fixed-term status. For ethnicity this is an improvement from the initial analysis, which found that BAME staff had a significantly lower average number of outputs at institutional level. In the final analysis by ethnicity, BAME had a higher average number of outputs in five UoAs and in a further five the distance between BAME and white staff had narrowed since the initial analysis.

Our analyses have found a small number of significant differences at UoA level but we have not observed any pattern of differences over multiple UoAs. Within UoAs where there are significant differences in the average number of outputs this is commonly linked to career stage and there are often no significant differences when grade is taken into account. On balance, the available data indicates that our output selection procedures represent a proportionate means of achieving the aims stated in the Code of Practice i.e. inclusion of the highest quality outputs, fair distribution of co-authored outputs, and representation of the breadth and diversity of research in the UoA and diversity of colleagues. Units of assessment that saw significant differences in the final analysis will monitor these on an ongoing basis and continue to look for opportunities to support staff with particular protected characteristics.

Conclusions

Our data-based approach has found no evidence that the procedures outlined in our Code of Practice result in unexplained bias towards staff of particular characteristics or that part-time or fixed-term staff are treated less favourably. Where we have observed disproportionate impacts on particular groups these can be explained with reference to other variables. As such we believe that our REF2021 procedures are fair and equitable and represent a legitimate means of achieving a proportionate aim. We have not seen any significant changes over the period covered by our analyses. One recurring theme that arises from our analyses is the greater diversity of staff in lower

graded academic roles. This reinforces the value of the work on the pipeline from these roles into other academic roles that is undertaken as part of our Athena Swan and Race Equality work.

Action plan

This report has been prepared for the REF2021 Steering Group and will also be shared with the Athena Swan Steering Group, Race Equality Steering Group and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Group for information. These groups have existing action plans and any items that are identified from this report will be incorporated into the relevant plans where they will benefit from the established structure and governance. Whilst this analysis does not reveal disproportionate impacts on particular groups, it will be of interest to these groups in planning their agendas and may be used as a starting point to advance equality.

Whilst the university has a long established and embedded workload planning allocation system, we are in the final stages of implementing a new workload planning record system, which should enable easier and more transparent access to data on research time allocation. This will mean that it will be feasible to analyse this on an annual basis alongside other equality analysis. This presents the relevant equalities steering groups with an opportunity to formulate questions around this data that can be explored through the annual data provision exercise. As such this strand will be woven into ongoing equalities work within the organisation.