

Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) - Coventry University

Purpose:

This document demonstrates how Coventry University has mainstreamed its commitment to equality throughout its Research Excellence Framework (REF) process. This work builds on the duties introduced by the Equality Act 2010, incorporates the requirements set by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and ensures local relevance. It has been undertaken as a longitudinal assessment, covering the period from December 2011 to October 2013.

What is the REF ?

The Research Excellence Framework (REF2014) is the system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions (HEIs). Undertaken by the four UK higher education funding bodies, the primary purpose is to produce assessment outcomes for each submission made by HEIs in order to inform the selective allocation of research funding to HEIs, provide accountability for public investment in research and produce evidence of the benefits of this investment, provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks. The REF is a process of expert review.

HEIs were invited to make submissions in up to 36 different units of assessment. An overall quality profile for each submission will be produced in 2014. Coventry University submitted the following units of assessment (UoA):

- Allied Health Professions: Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy;
- Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience;
- Earth Systems and Environmental Sciences;
- Mathematical Sciences;
- Computer Science and Informatics;
- General Engineering;
- Business and Management Studies;
- Politics and International Studies;
- Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory.

Each researcher within a unit was required to submit four research outputs (produced since 2008), although a reduction in this number was applied in the case of specific, personal circumstances (e.g. based on time spent away from the University due to part time working or maternity leave) and also where 'complex' (where reduced productivity extended beyond a period of absence e.g. due to ill health or caring responsibility)

Process for Staff Selection:

The University developed its Code of Practice on staff selection in March 2012, receiving HEFCE approval in July. In line with the process outlined in the Code, an initial long-list selection of staff took place in conjunction with an external, summary Mock REF Review (commencing with a University-wide review in Autumn 2012). Staff were informed whether they were included or excluded from this list; in cases where staff were excluded the Deputy-Vice Chancellor (Academic) wrote an individual letter to the member of staff concerned outlining the specific reason/s for exclusion. The Code and details of the Appeals process had by this time been sent to all staff and posted on the internal Staff Portal.

Following this, each Unit continued to refine its submission through external reviews, with similar feedback given where staff were to be excluded following these.

In total 172 staff were submitted by Coventry University to the REF 2014. As mentioned above it was standard for a researcher to be submitted with four research outputs. However this number could be reduced if a person had one or more listed, equality-related, reasons e.g. maternity leave, ill health or disability. To seek a reduction a researcher was required to complete a “Personal Circumstances Form” and return it to the University’s Equality and Diversity Manager. Both she and the Director of Research offered to meet with any researcher who needed advice or assistance with this. As detailed in the Code, the University convened a Personal Circumstances Panel (PCP) to consider and verify such requests.

Between June 2012 and November 2013 the PCP met 15 times. Of the 172 researchers submitted, 75 were allowed reductions in outputs by the PCP, including 9 for reasons relating to maternity and 6 disability or ill-health related (including caring responsibilities). The majority were Early Career Researchers.

How Coventry University Ensured Equality:

Using the REF Guidance we:

- identified the key equality-related issues in determining our final submission;
- established how we could harvest data for and/or verify the issue;
- from the outset planned and documented how we would meet the needs and requirements identified.

This process is contained within the table below.

Equality Consideration	Issue	How evidenced?	How the University responded
Age	Early Careers Researchers (of any age) are eligible to submit with reduced number of outputs; process different to RAE ¹ 2008	CHRIS ²	Briefing to key staff involved in determining REF submission on formula to apply; communication to <u>all</u> University staff; REF-specific training for UoA leaders and deputies.
Caring responsibility	The University does not monitor staff for caring responsibilities. In a briefing in October 2011 several UoA leaders identified that some staff had had their capacity to undertake research reduced by caring responsibilities – usually for elderly parent(s).	Enquiries	Exploration of issue in all training sessions e.g. caring for whom ? Evidencing. In addition the E&DM ³ and Director of Research could be - and indeed were - contacted by staff who wished to discuss this issue further.
Disability / Long Term Health Condition	There is a possibility that recently disabled staff may have been, or may still be, absent from the University and therefore have a gap in their research; also that they returned to reduced work load or hours. Staff with existing impairment may have faced a change in their circumstances or required additional reasonable adjustments.	CHRIS	The University has undertaken much work to increase the number of staff who declare a disability and developed systems to offer support (if required) following disclosure. Several staff took the opportunity afforded by the REF to formally disclose their impairment (although HR had knowledge already). Disability was explored at length (beyond the standard materials), in particular considering more than just time 'off sick'. All academic staff absent (long / medium term) from the University were sent the Code to their home address.
Ethnicity	The University is aware that nationally Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) staff were less likely to be	CHRIS	Although the statistics for Coventry University did not evidence lower

¹ Research Assessment Exercise; the last programme similar to the REF

² Coventry Human Resources Information System

³ Equality and Diversity Manager

	submitted than their white peers for the RAE 2008.		submission of BME staff to RAE 2008, the issue - and potential implications - was highlighted in training and monitored during the selection process.
Gender	It is known that nationally women were less likely to be submitted for the RAE than their male equivalents; a fact that was echoed within Coventry University.	CHRIS	Discrimination on the grounds of gender (including bullying and harassment) was highlighted in the mandatory training. The percentage of female : male staff will be monitored as the selection process continues. In addition the University has recently achieved the Bronze Award of the "Athena Charter" and aims to expand the benefits of this work beyond the Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths and Medicine (STEMM) areas where applicable.
Ill health	Staff may have been absent from the University and had their research affected further by medium term ill health that does not meet the Equality Act definition of disabled. However it is important that an institution encourages, and considers, requests based on the total time affected. It is important that this is communicated as some staff may have ruled themselves out due to their reduced research capabilities or periods of sickness absence.	CHRIS	All academic staff absent (long / medium term) from the University were sent the Code to their home address. Information on tariffs to be applied when determining number of outputs was posted on the internal staff Research Portal, as were the sample case studies supplied by the REF team.
Part time working	The REF allowed for a formulaic reduction in the number of outputs required for staff on a reduced contract.	CHRIS	Information on the tariffs applied with formulaic reductions were posted on the Research Portal. The possibility of combined reductions in outputs required was discussed at the training; it is known that some staff chose to work reduced hours following maternity/adoption leave for example.

Pregnancy & Maternity	The formulaic allowances for submission with reduced outputs was different in the REF to the RAE. This therefore required dissemination as there was the possibility that some staff had ruled themselves out or been thought not eligible on grounds of breaks from being research-active due to maternity or adoption leave.	CHRIS	This issue was highlighted in training including the effects/limitations imposed in some areas due to breastfeeding. All academic staff on maternity/adoption leave were sent the Code to their home address. In addition a further briefing session was held to accommodate a UoA leader who had recently returned from maternity leave. It is known that at least 4 researchers included in our submission had ruled themselves out prior to receiving the Code and additional information.
Religion or Belief	It is important that staff involved in the selection process understood, and could identify, the potential for discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief or none to occur.	CHRIS	The possibility of discrimination – direct or indirect – was explored in the mandatory training undertaken by all involved in the selection process. In addition, supporting information was posted on the Research Portal, whilst information on the main faiths / beliefs within our staff and student bodies can be found on the Equality and Diversity (E&D) Portal site. The University monitors this equality characteristic thus facilitating the identification of such discrimination, should it occur.
Secondment	The REF allowed for a formulaic reduction in the number of outputs required if staff had been on secondment. There was a need to raise awareness of this as staff may have already ruled themselves out of REF submission due to the effect of such an absence on their research.	CHRIS	This was widely discussed during training and further information sought from the ECU e.g. relevance of secondment to the research field. The table of tariffs for reductions is posted on the Research Portal (as highlighted in the Code). In the event most staff seeking a reduction for secondment reasons were ineligible

			as the secondment was found to be in-house to another REF-able position.
Sexual Orientation	It was important that staff involved in the selection process understood, and could identify, the potential for discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation to occur.	CHRIS	The possibility of discrimination – direct or indirect – was explored in the mandatory training undertaken by all involved in the selection process. In addition, supporting information was posted on the Research Portal. The University monitors this equality characteristic thus facilitating the identification of such discrimination, should it occur. The University also has an active Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) staff network who liaise regularly with the E&DM and HR.
Trans	There is the possibility of direct or indirect discrimination arising from gender reassignment e.g. non submission on the grounds of or due to not having 4 outputs and not applying the allowed formulaic reductions.	General enquiry to HR and LGBT Network	The University has no academic staff either undergoing or who had declared their intention to undergo gender reassignment. It does not monitor this equality characteristic but raised awareness of the issue (and support offered) during training, aware that a person might begin their transition before the REF census date or a new member of staff who is trans join the University.

The table above demonstrates how the University identified, considered and worked to meet the requirements / needs / considerations due to equality issues. We recognise that in addition the Equality Act 2010 gave public sector organisations, including HEIs three overriding General Duties to which they must have due regard in all they do.

Below we list these duties (in bold) and map the actions identified above against them. This mapping continued throughout the process and forms a key part of our longitudinal EIA.

- **To eliminate unlawful discrimination**, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;

The E&DM delivered many briefing sessions (both 'open' and bespoke) when the Act came into force (October 2010). This was reinforced by written communication (e.g. 'Daily Staff e-Noticeboard' and reports to key Committees. As the Act evolved updates were delivered, in particular at the introduction of the General Duty. A session on duties and rights under the Act is run at every new starter Staff Induction (mandatory) and for all modules of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Educational Professional Practice (PGCert in HEPP) undertaken by new academic staff and teaching assistants.

To further reinforce this duty for the REF all staff involved in the selection process completed our on-line training package on the law and good practice in equality and diversity. This package - Marshalls ACM - allows the E&D Officer to monitor usage and audit completion. Staff were required to complete this before attending the REF-specific training (below) in order to allow this to focus on application of equality within the REF process.

Seven face-to-face training/ briefing sessions were delivered by the E&DM using the materials developed by the ECU⁴. Again attendance was mandatory for any staff involved in selection for the REF. In addition these were open to any member of academic staff, while individual briefing sessions were run for Deans.

In addition during 2013 it was decided to make training on equality and diversity mandatory for all staff. This manifested as hour long briefings to all staff with line-management responsibility (by a member of ECU staff and the E&DM), whilst all other employees were required to complete the on line training package (described above).

Throughout the selection process Unit of Assessment leaders were required to be aware of implications for equality of their decisions and to seek advice where necessary on how to address these. Below we show this data (fig 1- 12 and tables 1 – 6); all academic staff, (eligible staff and staff submitted). Analyses are given by age, disability status, ethnicity and gender; also by religion or belief and sexual orientation but note these are based on a lower disclosure rate (49 and 48% respectively).

To ensure transparency we developed a bespoke appeals process for any member of staff who believed they were discriminated against in the REF process. This ensured issues, should such arise, could be dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner. In the event no appeals were submitted for equality related reasons.

- **To advance equality of opportunity** between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it;

By taking time to identify equality issues (building on REF guidance) and to evidence occurrence at Coventry University we believe we have been able to ensure we submit our "excellent" researchers for the REF 2014. We communicated the Code and details of how to seek a

⁴ Equality Challenge Unit

reduction in outputs required every term since April 2012 via an all staff e mail from the Director of Research. Hard copies were mailed to the home address of academic staff on medium or long term absence for whatever reason (10 in total).

- **To foster good relations** between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

As with many equality issues, especially positive action, there is a clear need to be transparent on why some staff may be seen to be treated more favourably e.g. submitted with fewer outputs than the standard four. The briefings detailed the 'why' and the UoA leaders understood that they would only know an amount of reduction, not the reasons for this. (Staff seeking reductions were also made fully aware of this). However it was recognised that other staff within a UoA may realise a person with fewer outputs was being included. By widely disseminating reasons in general (and associated tariffs) it was hoped to foster an ethos of understanding and therefore good relations. In the training / briefings we also gave examples, with explanations, of issues that did not qualify for a reduction.

In addition the Director of Research and the E&DM were happy to deal with questions from any member of staff relating to equality and the REF. In reality the main issues that staff sought to discuss centred on the effects of how either an impairment or caring responsibility had impacted on their ability to undertake research within the REF census period.

Data on Staff:

The following charts and tables show analyses by age, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion or belief and sexual orientation; of 'eligible staff' (either self-identified or identified through the annual appraisal system as being eligible for submission to the REF 2014) and of those included in the final submission. Comparison data: eligible staff (July 2012) and submitted to the REF (October 2013).

Note: some staff who were 'eligible' in July 2012 had left the University before the final submission; equally some who were submitted were not employed at Coventry the previous year.

Fig.1 Age - Eligible

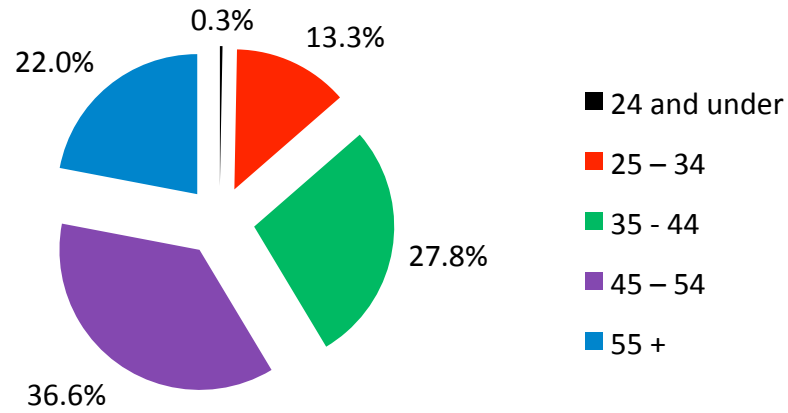


Fig. 2 Age - Submitted

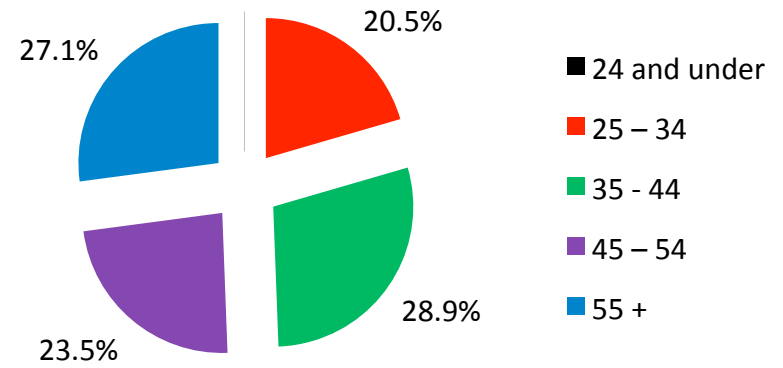


Table 1 REF 2013 - Age

	Eligible	Submitted
24 and under	0.3%	
25 - 34	13.3%	20.5%
35 - 44	27.8%	28.9%
45 - 54	36.6%	23.5%
55 +	22.0%	27.1%

Fig.3 Disability - Eligible

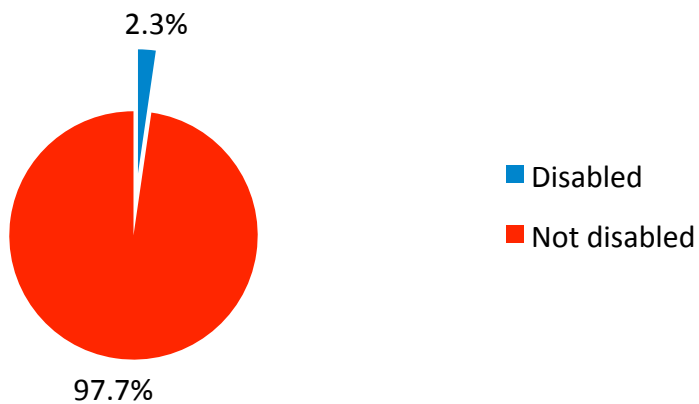


Fig.4 Disability - Submitted

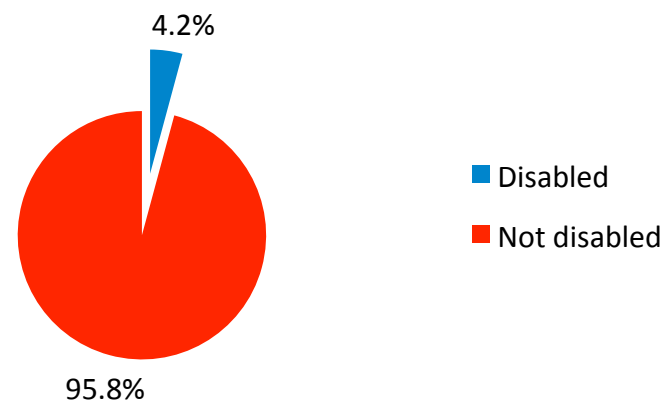


Table 2 REF 2013 - Disability

	Eligible	Submitted
Disabled	2.3%	4.2% ⁵
Not disabled	97.7%	95.8%

⁵ This increase is partly accounted for as several staff disclosed during the REF period

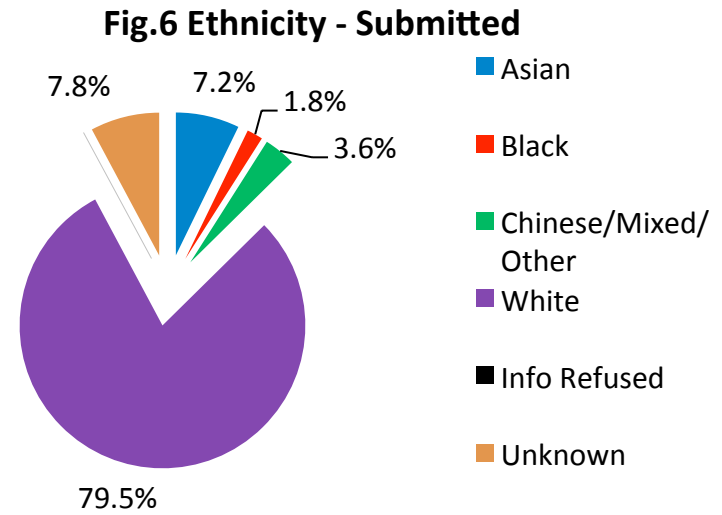
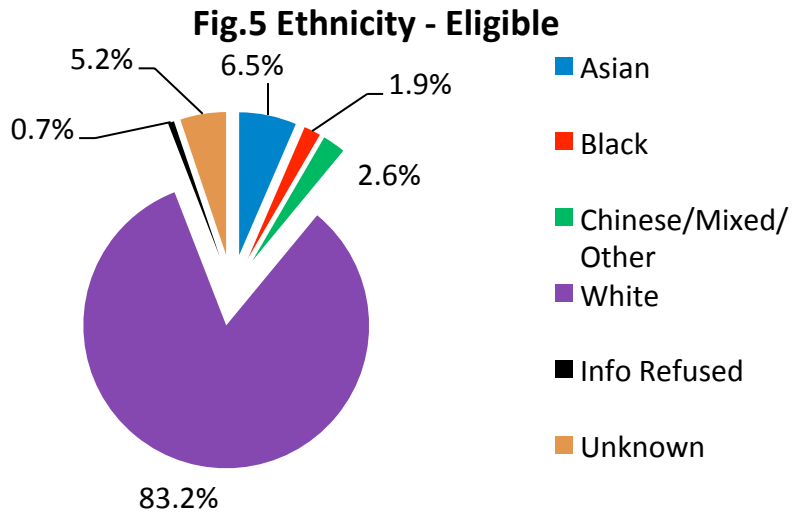


Table 3 REF 2013 - Ethnicity		
	Eligible	Submitted
Asian	6.5%	7.2%
Black	1.9%	1.8%
Chinese/Mixed/Other	2.6%	3.6%
White	83.2%	79.5%
Info Refused	0.7%	
Unknown	5.2%	7.8%

Fig.7 Gender - Eligible

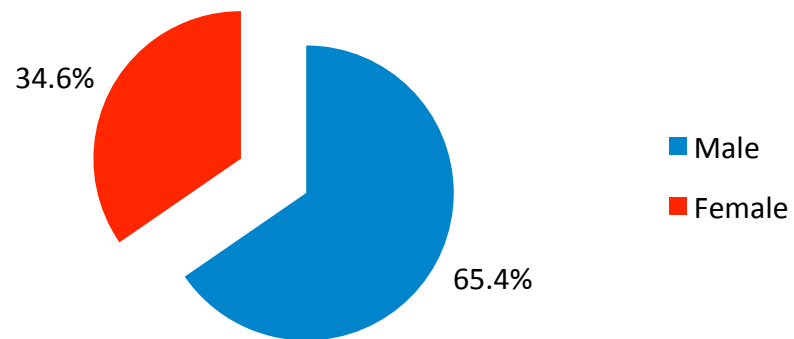


Fig.8 Gender - Submitted

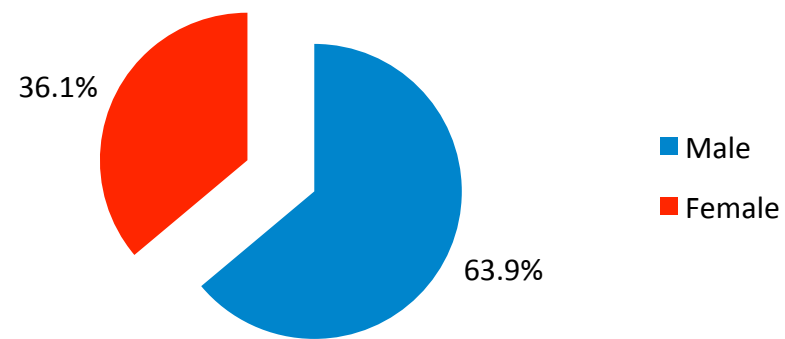


Table 4 REF 2013 - Gender

	Eligible ⁶	Submitted
Male	65.4%	63.9%
Female	34.6%	36.1%

⁶ The widening of the gap between all and eligible staff is predominantly due to contract status. Increasing diversity at senior levels is one of our five Equality Objectives.

Fig.9 Religion or Belief - Eligible

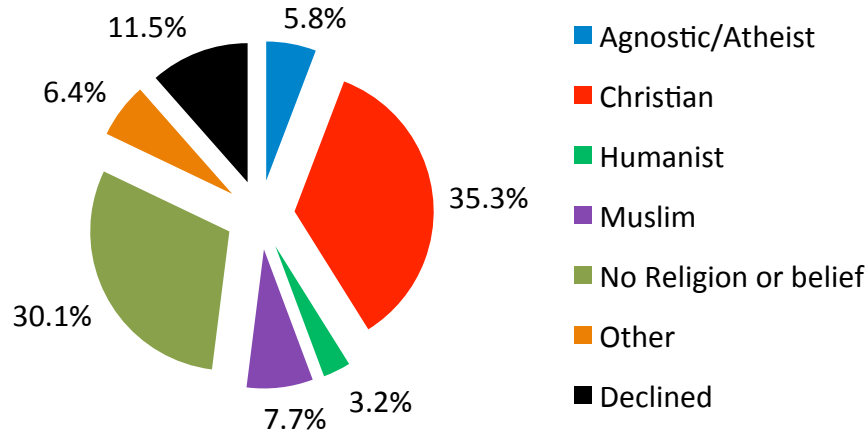


Fig.10 Religion or Belief - Submitted

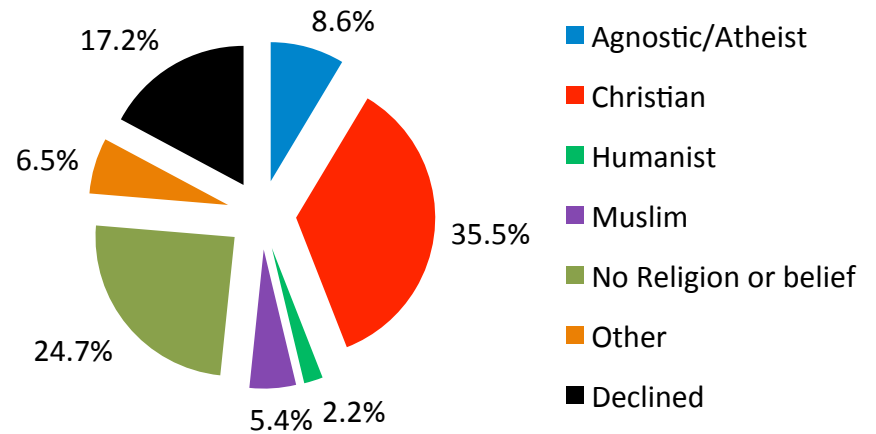


Table 5 REF 2013 – Religion or Belief

	Eligible	Submitted
Agnostic/Atheist	5.8%	8.6%
Christian	35.3%	35.5%
Humanist	3.2%	2.2%
Muslim	7.7%	5.4%
No Religion or belief	30.1%	24.7%
Other	6.4%	6.5%
Declined	11.5%	17.2%

Fig.11 Sexual Orientation - Eligible

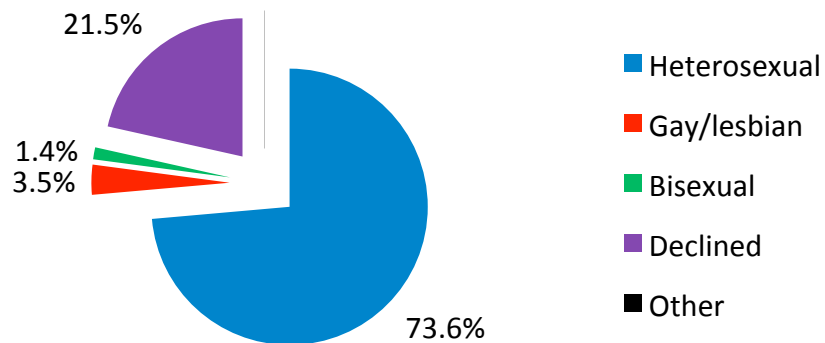


Fig.12 Sexual Orientation - Submitted

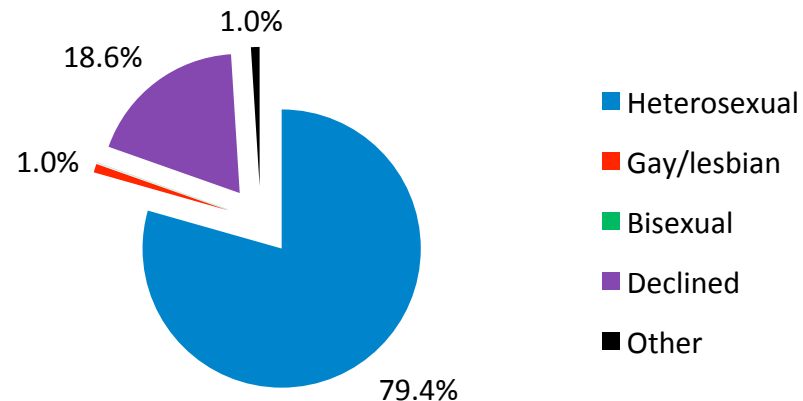


Table 6 REF 2013 – Sexual Orientation

	Eligible	Submitted
Heterosexual	73.6%	79.4%
Gay/lesbian	3.5%	1.0%
Bisexual	1.4%	
Declined	21.5%	18.6%
Other		1.0%

Conclusion

We believe we have taken the opportunity given by the requirements of the Equality Act, as reinforced by HEFCE to enrich the whole research environment at Coventry University. By a thorough and documented identification of potential issues we were able to embed this work in the REF process. As would be expected, due to relatively low numbers for the data, there are some minor imbalances evidenced within the statistics above. However, due to the actions undertaken within this process, we are confident that these are for research-quality not equality reasons. Furthermore this process has ensured that equality remains embedded in the research arena at Coventry University as we embark on a new Research Strategy.

Further Information

If you would like further information on this document please contact the Equality and Diversity Office on 024 7688 7148 or equality.per@coventry.ac.uk

Final Version – Subject to approval by Research Committee – 25 March 2014

Approved by Personal Circumstances Panel 28 January 2014