Valuing a wider range of contributions, including open research, through our academic promotion criteria

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See Implementation guide section: *Policy and procedure*

About the University of Suffolk

The University of Suffolk is a teaching intensive institution with 3,454 students and 654 staff at the time of writing. 37% of academic staff have significant responsibility for research.

What has changed?

The University's academic promotion criteria are being reviewed to include a wider range of contributions, and to explicitly value open research. Previously, open research contributions were noted in promotion applications and highlighted in managerial recommendations – but this was through informal interpretations of promotion criteria. Future criteria will explicitly value open research.

It has been agreed that new criteria will include the following reference to open research:

"Leading Open Research Practices and Collaborative Initiatives: Lead efforts on open research including open access, citizen science and data sharing and reuse, collaborative open project, open source and share research data in open repositories. This includes mentoring researchers and effectively engaging with open research communities."

Additionally, a new career pathway called Research and Impact in academia has been created. This pathway values both traditional academic outputs and broader societal impact. This includes the generation of new knowledge through rigorous investigation and scholarship, the dissemination of research findings through appropriate academic and public channels and the creation of impact through application of research to benefit society. This may include building research collaborations and networks that enhance knowledge creation.

To support academic staff in adapting to these changes, we have also developed a structured training and development programme as part of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Development Programme. This initiative provides targeted sessions to equip staff with the knowledge and skills required to navigate the evolving academic landscape. Examples of sessions created to support development of open research knowledge and skills are provided below:

Introduction to Open Science workshop

Understanding critical data literacy workshop

Drop-In sessions - Research Repositories and Open Access Clinics

As part of our institutional commitment to research culture and academic recognition, we are also planning a high-profile event in Autumn 2025, open to members of the CoARA, UKRN OR4, academic colleagues, and invited speakers. This event will serve as a platform for knowledge exchange, best practice sharing, and collaborative discussions on advancing research assessment.

Why was the change undertaken?

The need for change was first identified through our participation in the UKRN OR4 project and further reinforced by insights gathered from a comprehensive Knowledge Exchange mapping exercise conducted between September and October 2024. One of the key insights from this process was the

need to integrate knowledge exchange into the academic promotion criteria, ensuring that contributions to external engagement, collaboration, and impact are valued alongside traditional measures of research and teaching excellence.

Our ongoing involvement in UKRN OR4 and our recent commitment as a signatory to the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) have further highlighted the importance of aligning our promotion framework with sector-wide best practices. By embedding these principles into our institutional structures, we aim to create a more inclusive, equitable, and comprehensive academic recognition system that fully acknowledges the diverse contributions of academic staff.

How was the change carried out?

Two workshops were held as part of the institutional review of our academic promotion criteria, with all academic staff invited to participate and contribute. 40 colleagues joined us, sharing their valuable insights and helping to explore ways to better recognize and value the diverse academic experiences and contributions within our university. A follow-up workshop, attended by 31 participants, took place on 5th February 2025 to present key outcomes from the January workshops. This session provided colleagues with an opportunity to contribute further insights, offer feedback on the process, and help shape the next steps.

- Total attendance for the two workshops: 71 (excluding Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and KE and the Head for Research Culture and KE who led the workshop).

- Number of responses via Microsoft Forms: 8.

- Participants: Research Associates, Research Fellows, Senior Research Fellows, Lecturers, Senior Lecturers, Associate Professors, Professors, Representatives from Directorate of People and Organisational Development including the Deputy director.

Points for discussion in the workshop:

- Considering our academic pathways – have we got the right ones?

- What's working well and what is not?

- What is missing?

- Looking further afield

- Sharing good ideas

- Feedback

- Academic identity and job crafting

- EDI

- Characteristics of a Suffolk Academic

The data collected from the interactive workshops has now been compiled and documented. A variety of engagement methods, including exercises, group discussions, feedback sessions with the wider group, and Microsoft Form surveys opened to the wider academic community, were used to gather participants' insights and perspectives. All findings are now being utilised to develop the new Promotion Academic Criteria, which will be reviewed and approved by the relevant Institutional Committees, including the Unions. This collaborative approach ensures that the process is inclusive, reflective of participant contributions, and aligned with institutional priorities.

Feedback from attendees was strongly positive, with comments including: *"Much needed"*, *"The process was exceptionally collaborative. Gave us what happened/ came out of previous meeting and ended with where we are going after this meeting"* and *"Fantastic opportunity to get comprehensive feedback/ input into processes and pathways"*

Challenges and lessons learnt

The UKRN Open OR4, our ongoing developments, and the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) Action Plan remain central to this work. They are now standing items on both the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee and the Research and Enterprise Committee, reinforcing our commitment to sustained and strategic development in this area. By integrating continuous feedback throughout the process, we can adapt and refine our approach based on insights from the academic community.

Recommendations

- Involving academic staff at varied career stages from the outset and maintaining open communication throughout creates a sense of ownership and collective commitment across the institution.

- Integrate customised training and development sessions into the Research and Knowledge Exchange Development Programme to bridge knowledge gaps, enhance staff confidence, and encourage broader participation.

- Strengthening our approach by engaging with broader sector initiatives (such as OR4 and CoARA) enhances institutional credibility, builds momentum, and reinforces our commitment to best practices in open research delivery, research assessment and knowledge exchange. Making these initiatives a standing agenda item in institutional committees ensures sustained visibility, accountability, and alignment with sector-wide reforms. This keeps progress a strategic priority and subject to continuous evaluation.

- A dynamic approach that allows for adjustments based on staff feedback and institutional priorities ensures the implementation process remains relevant, effective, and responsive to evolving needs.

Resources

Senior Lecturer/ Senior Research Fellow

Associate Professor

Professor

Producing High-Quality Publications: Produce high-quality publications in respected journals and research outputs appropriate to your discipline.

Leading Research Projects: Lead effective research projects and funding applications, actively contributing to large funding bids and securing funding grants for research.

Innovative and Inclusive Research Practices: Implement innovative and inclusive research practices that address diverse needs that address diverse needsand promote equity within the research environment. **Engaging in Open Access Publishing:** Demonstrate a commitment to publishing research in open access journals or repositories, ensuring that research findings are accessible to a wider audience. **Developing Research Networks:** Develop research networks, collaborate on interdisciplinary projects, and present research findings at national and international conferences building recognition. **Generating Research Impact:** Manage stakeholder groups and generate evidence of emerging research impact through your work and publish in open access journals to increase visibility. **Contributing to PGR Supervision:** Actively contribute to PGR supervision teams, the Research Development Programme and supporting and mentoring early career researchers (ECRs). **Contributing to Research Culture and Engaging in Peer Review:** Contribute to peer review and quality assurance both internally (e.g., bids and REF outputs) and externally (e.g., academic journals), and participate in research committees and groups.

Achieving Research Distinction: Achieve personal research distinction arising from an important contribution to the advancement of your discipline and develop your international reputation. **Producing Excellent Publications:** Produce excellent research publications and outputs in terms of their originality, significance, and rigour, evidencing national/international impact. **Innovative and Inclusive Research Practices:** Lead the implementation of innovative

and inclusive research practices, fostering a diverse, interdisciplinary and equitable research environment. **Leading Open Research Practices and Collaborative Initiatives:** Lead efforts on open research including open access, citizen science and data sharing and reuse, collaborative open project, open source and share research data in open repositories. This includes mentoring researchers and effectively engaging with open research communities. **Leading PGR Supervision:** Lead PGR supervision teams, making a significant contribution to the research development programme (RDP) and mentorship. **Developing Successful Grant Applications:** Lead the development of successful research grant applications which include ECRs to win research funding from a variety of sources. **Demonstrating Research Leadership:** Demonstrate research leadership and strategic level involvement with the growth of research activity and actively participate in peer reviews of outputs; proposals and grants. **Engaging with Industry:** Engage with industry partners, public, private and civil society to apply research findings to real-world problems and enhance practical applications.

Sustaining Research Distinction: Sustain personal research distinction arising from important contributions to the advancement of your discipline and accomplish an international reputation. **Producing Rigorous Publications:** Produce excellent research publications and outputs in terms of their originality, significance, and rigour, including at least 4 outputs in the last 5 years, with at least 2 meeting the REF criteria for 3* or 4* quality. **Gaining National and International Esteem:** Be recognised as a leading expert, having gained indicators of national and international esteem through the development of new knowledge, innovation, and understanding in the field. **Innovative and Inclusive Research Strategies:** Champion innovative and inclusive research practices at a strategic level, driving institutional change towards a more diverse, interdisciplinary and equitable research culture. **Advocacy and Policy Development for Open Research:** Actively advocate for and contribute to the development of institutional or departmental policies that promote open research practices. This includes participating in committees or working groups focused on open science and mentoring colleagues at all levels to adopt these practices. **Leading Panels and Committees:** Lead panels, committees, or boards such as subject associations, learned societies, or relevant professional bodies, and membership of significant external research groups. **Attracting PGRs and Mentorship:** Attract PGRs to UoS, take a leading role in PGR supervisions to several successful completions, and provide effective mentorship to other researchers at all levels. **Securing Substantial Funding and Developing Research Environment:** Successfully attract substantial research funding as principal or co-investigator in the last three years, lead research funding initiatives that have generated income in support of research by others and take a leading role in developing the vitality and sustainability of the research environment of the university, including leadership of unit of assessment for REF and enabling impact from research.