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**Research Excellence Framework**

# Guidance to panels



Higher Education Funding Council for England  
Scottish Funding Council  
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales  
Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland

# Research Excellence Framework: Guidance to panels

1. This document provides guidance for Main Panels A-D to develop, with input from their sub-panels, criteria and working methods for the assessment of higher education research in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF).

## Introduction

2. The UK higher education funding bodies intend to give higher education institutions (HEIs) the fullest possible account of the assessment framework, criteria, data requirements and processes involved in the REF, to enable them to prepare submissions and to ensure transparency and confidence in the REF process. They will publish this information in the following documents:

- a. **'Assessment framework and guidance on submissions'** (hereafter, 'guidance on submissions'), to be published in July 2011. This document, produced by the REF team, will set out:
  - i. The overall framework for assessment and administrative arrangements for the 2014 REF.
  - ii. The generic criteria for assessment that will be applied in all units of assessment (UOAs).
  - iii. The standard set of data and information that will be required from institutions in making their submissions, and the standard definitions that apply.
  - iv. Procedural guidance to institutions on preparing their submissions.
  
- b. The **'Panel criteria and working methods'** (hereafter, 'panel criteria'), to be published in draft for consultation in late July 2011 and in final form in early 2012. This document will include some generic statements provided by the REF team, and a statement by each main panel, with input from their sub-panels, that will:
  - i. Describe in more detail the assessment criteria that each main panel and its group of sub-panels will apply when assessing submissions.
  - ii. Provide further guidance to institutions on what kinds of evidence and indicators should be included in the narrative elements of their submissions (in particular, the impact and environment elements).
  - iii. Describe how the main panels will in practice fulfil their role in overseeing the assessment process.
  - iv. Describe how the sub-panels will in practice carry out the assessment.

## Key points

3. Each of the four main panels is invited to develop its panel criteria and working methods statement, that:

- a. Sets out – within the overall framework for assessment that is described in the 'guidance on submissions' document – the criteria and working methods that

the main panel and its group of sub-panels will apply in assessing submissions to REF 2014.

b. Describes criteria and methods for assessing submissions from institutions that will be made according to the data requirements and definitions defined in 'guidance on submissions'. The panel criteria must take account of all the information required in submissions. Each main panel should provide further guidance on the types of information required within the textual parts of submissions, but should not request additional types of information that do not fit within the standard format for submissions.

c. Provides a single, consistent set of criteria that will be applied by its group of sub-panels when undertaking the assessment, with variations in the criteria of any of its sub-panels only where these are justified by differences in the nature of the discipline. The funding bodies expect the variation in criteria between the group of sub-panels within each main panel to be the minimum that is necessary to reflect differences between research in their disciplines. The main panel should not agree to differences in criteria on the basis of sub-panel preferences, where they are not justified on this basis.

d. Provides a common approach to the working methods of its group of sub-panels, while recognising that some differences in the sub-panels' working methods may be required to reflect differences in the scale and breadth of their remit.

e. Addresses each of the questions set out at the end of this document.

10. Each main panel should develop its criteria and working methods with detailed input from its group of sub-panels.

11. In addition to addressing the 25 questions below, the REF team will set out in the panel criteria document and its annexes the **generic** criteria and procedures that all panels will follow in undertaking the REF assessment.

12. It is possible that main panels may develop similar criteria or methods in response to some of the questions below, or may use variations in language to express the same ideas. To ensure that each of the four panel criteria statements is produced with appropriate consistency:

a. The panel criteria statements will have a common structure, with each addressing the questions set out below in turn.

b. The main panel chairs, main panel advisers and REF team will meet regularly throughout the process of drafting the statements to discuss emerging criteria and identify issues where consistency across main panels is feasible and desirable.

c. The REF team will edit the statements to ensure consistency of structure, style and terminology.

13. The REF team and UK funding bodies will review the draft and final panel criteria statements prior to publication to ensure their adherence to the guidance set out in this document, and to the overall framework for assessment set out in 'guidance on submissions'.

14. Once we have published final statements of criteria (in early 2012), we will not permit main or sub-panels to depart from them other than in exceptional circumstances that cannot be accommodated within the published framework. In such cases, we will publish the reason and details of the change as an amendment.

## **Generic criteria and procedures**

15. This document provides guidance to panels specifically on developing their criteria and working methods, within the overall assessment framework set out in 'guidance on submissions'. As mentioned in paragraph 11, the REF team will provide statements about the generic criteria for assessment – drawn from 'guidance on submissions' – for inclusion in the panel criteria and annexes. This will include the generic assessment criteria and level definitions for each of the three sub-profiles, the weighting of each element (outputs, impact and environment) and the method for combining sub-profiles to form the overall quality profiles.

16. The REF team will also set out the generic procedures for panels to follow in the panel criteria document. This will include:

- confidentiality arrangements
- guidance on managing major and minor conflicts of interest
- guidance on dealing with short-term absences of the main or sub-panel chair
- procedures for recruiting appointing additional assessors
- guidance on the scope and timing of calibration exercises, and access to material that may be used in calibration exercises
- procedures for taking account of circumstances that constrained an individual's ability to produce four outputs during the assessment period
- guidance on access to and use of citation data
- procedures for obtaining research outputs for assessment
- procedures for requesting cross-referrals and requesting specialist advice for outputs not in English
- procedures for requesting audit queries and corroboration of impact case studies
- guidance on recording panel discussions and decisions
- guidance on the form and content of panels' overview reports and of concise feedback to institutions on submissions.

17. We will also provide a briefing on equalities and diversity issues for main and sub-panels in carrying out the 2014 REF.

## Timetable for developing the panel criteria

February - June 2011	Initial rounds of panel meetings
July 2011	Publication of draft panel criteria and working methods for consultation
July - early October 2011	Consultation period (including workshops with research users)
November - December 2011	Final round of panel meetings in criteria-setting phase
January 2012	Publication of panel criteria and working methods

## Content of panel criteria and working methods

18. In developing their criteria and working methods, each main panel should address the 25 questions below. For each question the main panel should describe the common approach across its group of sub-panels, and state any differences between the sub-panels where agreed by the main panel on the basis that they are justified by differences in the nature of the disciplines concerned.

19. The UK funding bodies expect each main panel criteria statement to follow the structure set out in questions 1-25 below, and do not expect there to be specific sections of the statements that describe the criteria and methods of each sub-panel in turn.

### Submissions and units of assessment

Q1. Describe the areas of research that fall within each of the units of assessment covered by the main panel, the boundaries of each UOA, which other UOAs are on the boundaries, and in which other UOAs research on these boundaries may be submitted.

Q2. Describe the general arrangements the group of sub-panels under each main panel will deploy to assess submissions which span the boundaries between two or more UOAs, and state the extent to which the group of sub-panels expects it will be necessary to cross-refer material between sub-panels for advice. Any sub-panels which expect to cross-refer a significant volume of material to other sub-panels should be identified.

Q3. 'Guidance on submissions' sets out generic criteria and procedures for permitting multiple submissions (two or more submissions from an HEI in a single UOA). Given the nature of the disciplines covered by the main panel, state which of the sub-panels expect to receive multiple submissions, and describe the anticipated characteristics of multiple submissions in these UOAs.

### Assessment criteria: Outputs

Q4. Describe in more detail the generic criteria of 'rigour, originality and significance' and the generic level definitions, as they will be applied by the group of sub-panels under each main panel in assessing outputs and developing the outputs sub-profile.

Q5. Describe the range of types of research output that may be listed in submissions in the group of UOAs, and how the main panel will ensure that all types of eligible outputs will be assessed on an equal basis. (Note that all types of output that are made publicly available within the publication period – 1 January 2008 to 31 December 2013 – and that embody research as defined in the ‘guidance on submissions’, will be eligible for submission).

Q6. Explain the arrangements for the assessment of co-authored or co-produced outputs by the group of sub-panels under each main panel, including:

- a. Whether the sub-panels will take account of an individual author’s contribution to an output, and, if so:
  - how the sub-panels will take account of this in assessing outputs
  - what specific information is required about the author’s contribution (maximum 100 words) and in what circumstances this information is required.
- b. Whether a co-authored output may be listed against more than one member of staff returned **within the same submission**. (Where two or more co-authors of an output are returned in **different submissions**, any or all of these may list the same output.)

Q7. ‘Guidance on submissions’ sets out a generic process for institutions to request that an output of extended scale and scope should be ‘double-weighted’ by the sub-panel (that is, it should count as two outputs rather than one, regardless of its quality rating). Describe:

- a. What criteria the group of sub-panels under each main panel will apply in deciding whether to double-weight an output of extended scale and scope, where this is requested.
- b. What kind of information an institution should provide in its submission when making such requests (maximum 100 words).
- c. Given the nature of the disciplines covered by the main panel, indicate how numerous or rare double-weighted outputs are expected to be in these UOAs.

Q8. State whether the group of sub-panels under each main panel require any of the following types of additional information to be submitted alongside outputs, and if so describe the circumstances in which they are required, the nature of the information required, and how the sub-panels will use the information in the assessment:

- a. Information about the significance of the output that has become available subsequent to its publication (maximum 100 words). This could include, for example, additional factual information about how an output has gained recognition, led to further developments or has been applied, if this has occurred subsequent to its publication. It cannot include citation data: the REF team will

provide citation data in a standard form (see question 9) to any panels that make use of it.

b. For non-text or practice-based outputs (performances, artefacts and so on), a description of the research process, only where this is not evident within the output (maximum 300 words).

Q9. The REF team will provide citation data in a standard form to those sub-panels that wish to make use of such data as additional information about the academic significance of individual outputs. (The REF team will also provide guidance to these panels about the use of citation data.) State which sub-panels will make use of citation data for this purpose, and where this is so:

a. Explain how these sub-panels will interpret the data and make use of it to inform judgements; how much emphasis they will place on the data; and how they will ensure that judgements about the quality of outputs will be based on the full range of assessment criteria ('originality, rigour and significance').

b. State how the sub-panels will ensure that all submitted outputs will be assessed on an equal footing, including outputs for which citation data are:

- unavailable (for example, not published in an indexed journal)
- unsuitable as an indicator (for example, an applied research output)
- not meaningful at the time of the assessment (for example, published shortly before the assessment takes place).

### **Assessment criteria: Impact**

Q10. Describe what types of impact the group of sub-panels under each main panel would expect to be submitted in impact case studies. (This information should be indicative and helpful to institutions in preparing submissions, but not exhaustive. Any impact that meets the general definition in the guidance on submissions will be eligible for submission and should be assessed on an equal footing.)

Q11. Provide guidance about the forms of evidence and types of indicators of impact that would be appropriate to include in case studies. Include guidance on any specific issues that the main panel anticipates may present challenges, for example:

- guidance on how to provide appropriate evidence of impacts that are commercially confidential or sensitive for security reasons
- guidance on appropriate forms of evidence of impacts that arise from engaging the public with research.

Q12. Describe in more detail the generic criteria of 'reach and significance' and the level definitions in the impact sub-profile, as they will be applied by the group of sub-panels under each main panel in assessing the impact element of submissions. This may include explanation of the relationship between 'reach' and 'geographic spread', and how the criteria relate to impacts at differing stages of development or maturity.

Q13. Describe what kinds of evidence should be included in case studies about the quality of underpinning research; and how the sub-panels will make judgements that the body of research underpinning a case study as a whole meets the quality threshold.

Q14. Each submission will include a completed template about how the submitted unit has supported and enabled impact during the assessment period (1 January 2008 to 31 July 2013). Provide guidance about the types of evidence and indicators that submissions should include in this statement.

Q15. Describe what approach the group of sub-panels under each main panel will take to forming the impact sub-profiles, on the basis of their assessments of the case studies and the statement on how impact was supported (question 14). Indicate how much relative weight will be attached to each in forming the impact sub-profiles. (The funding bodies expect that the majority of the impact sub-profiles will be based on the assessment of case studies, but that the statement on how impact was supported will also play a significant role in informing the impact sub-profiles.)

### **Assessment criteria: Environment**

Q16. Each submission will include information about the research environment, provided in a standard template. Provide guidance about what kinds of evidence and indicators should be submitted within the environment template, including:

- a. Any specific types of information requested or examples of types of evidence.
- b. How the submission should explain any distinct groups or units covered within the submission.

Q17. Each submission will include data on doctoral degrees awarded and research income, reported to panels in a standard form (as set out in the 'guidance on submissions'). Describe how the group of sub-panels under each main panel will use the standard data analysis to inform judgements about the research environment. The main panel may also request that more detailed or additional data be required in submissions in specific UOAs, as follows:<sup>1</sup>

- a. That the standard data should be reported in submissions by 'research group', stating what level of granularity is requested.
- b. That additional quantitative data should be provided by institutions within the environment template. Any such requests must clearly specify and define the data so that it can be provided on a consistent basis, and must explain how the data will

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<sup>1</sup> The main panel should only support such requests where they are justified by the nature of the disciplines concerned. The REF manager will agree to any such requests only where the data are clearly defined and potentially auditable, and the value of the data in informing the assessment is judged to outweigh the burden on institutions in providing it.



be used to inform the assessment, including its relative importance in informing judgements.

Q18. Describe how the group of sub-panels under each main panel will form the environment sub-profiles on the basis of the submitted information, including:

- a. How much relative importance the sub-panels will attach to each component within the environment template.
- b. Description of the generic criteria of 'vitality and sustainability' and the level definitions as they will be applied by the sub-panels in assessing the research environment.

(Note that the REF team will produce a generic statement in the panel criteria document about the methodology for combining the three sub-profiles to form the overall quality profiles, and about the overall quality profiles being the result of the collective judgement of panels, taking into account all the submitted evidence.)

### **Panel working methods**

Q19. Describe how the main panel will provide oversight of sub-panel procedures. In particular, describe the main panel's expectations for overseeing arrangements for assessing interdisciplinary research, cross-referrals between sub-panels, and the selection and use of assessors.

Q20. Describe how the main panel will work with its sub-panels to ensure adherence to the assessment criteria, including the equalities and diversity measures, and ensuring equal treatment of all types of output. (Methods might include inviting reports from sub-panel chairs at regular intervals; or the attendance by additional main panel members to observe a sample of sub-panel meetings.)

Q21. Describe how the main panel will in practice ensure the consistent application of assessment standards by its sub-panels, particularly for outputs where the criteria are internationally referenced. It should also describe what role will be played by the international and research user members on the main panel in this process. (Methods might include: the use of bibliometric or other evidence about the international standing of UK research disciplines; cross-panel calibration exercises; regular reports from sub-panel chairs; common approaches by all sub-panels to the formation of each of the three sub-profiles and to the sequence in which each sub-profile is developed; the attendance of additional main panel members at some sub-panel meetings.)

Q22. Describe the approach of the group of sub-panels under each main panel to ensuring that submissions will be assessed by members and assessors with appropriate expertise. (Approaches might include: the participation of additional assessors in the assessment, to extend the breadth and depth of expertise on the panel; the method of allocating the work of assessing submissions among the panel members and assessors ; where necessary, cross-referring parts of submissions to other specific sub-panels for advice.)

Q23. The funding bodies expect that the impact element of submissions should be assessed by a broadly even mix of research 'user' and academic expertise. They expect that 'user' members and assessors on sub-panels will be fully involved in assessing impact, but their involvement in assessing other elements of submissions is optional (depending on their willingness and expertise). Describe the intentions of the group of sub-panels under each main panel for involving 'user' members and assessors in the assessment, including their involvement in briefing, training and participation at each stage of the assessment.

Q24. Describe the approach that the group of sub-panels under each main panel will take to ensuring consistency of assessment within the sub-panel, including plans for calibration exercises (the REF team will provide further guidance to panels on the scope and timing of calibration exercises that will be supported administratively). Further approaches might include methods of allocating submissions to members and assessors, and regular monitoring.

Q25. Describe the approach that the group of sub-panels under each main panel will take to ensuring that all submissions will be examined in sufficient detail to form robust judgements about them, including a statement of the proportion of submitted outputs (indicating the minimum and maximum proportion) the sub-panels will examine in detail. (Note that the funding bodies expect that all the submitted evidence in relation to environment and impact will be examined in sufficient detail to form judgements about these aspects of the submissions, but that panels need not examine all submitted outputs in detail.)