

## Q&A of general RAE 2006-related issues

### *(I) Carnegie Scholarships*

Q1. Will the categorizing of output items into the four Carnegie Scholarships serve as a means by the UGC to consider the roles or development stages of the institutions? Will this categorizing affect the scores of the output items?

A1. *Paragraph 23 of the Guidance Notes states that the purpose of introducing the four Carnegie scholarships in the Exercise is to “**help address the perceived bias in favour of basic/traditional research**”. It is also stated in paragraph 47 of the Guidance Notes that “[t]he spread of submissions across the four categories of scholarship and, where appropriate, across disciplines may provide a basis for the UGC to consider the research performance of an institution against its role. However, **scoring will be made without regard to the category of the items submitted**”.*

*Thus, the role and mission of an institution will not per se be factored into the assessment process. This is because the RAE 2006 is an assessment of research performance, not an assessment of the institution’s performance against its role. The performance of institutions against role will be reflected in the Performance and Role Related Funding Scheme.*

### *(II) Eligibility of Staff Members*

Q1. If the intention (of paragraph 37 of the Guidance Notes) is to look at “sustainable” research capacity, setting a census date creates anomalies as taking a cross-section at the end of the period does not reflect the full record of achievement by the cost centre over the four years. Would it be more appropriate to stipulate that the person involved was at the institution during the previous four years for at least half of the time of his/her appointment, i.e. not on no-pay leave?

A1. *The suggested revision does not work well for those academics recently employed by the institutions, so as to reflect the updated research capacity of the institutions.*

Q2. The rationale for setting 1 January 2005 as the date for staff inclusion eligibility is unclear. Would it be more appropriate to reset the beginning of employment at a later date such as 1 July 2005 or 1 September 2005?

- A2. *The setting of the date is a difficult issue. We need to strike a balance between taking account of recent appointments and preventing the possibility of the use of inappropriate means to obtain higher RAE scores, say by taking on transient or short-term academic staff with high-quality research outputs. On balance, we consider it appropriate to maintain the date at 1 January 2005.*
- Q3. If, for example, one staff member transfers from one local institution to the next after January 2005, the staff would not be counted from either institution. In order to capture this staff member in the Exercise, could the staff eligibility date be moved from 1 January 2005 to 1 September 2005?
- A3. *The rationale behind the suggestion is noted. However, this example may represent only a rare situation. The deferral of the employment start date is considered not appropriate as explained in A2 above.*
- Q4. Are academic staff members who hold joint appointments at other institutions eligible for the RAE 2006?
- A4. *According to paragraph 37 (b) of the Guidance Notes, if the staff holds “concurrent paid positions at other institutions”, they will not be counted.*
- Q5. In view of the widespread adoption of the North American system of the four staff grades: Chair Professor/Professor/Associate Professor/Assistant Professor, can the categorization of eligible staff, i.e. the ‘A’ to ‘I’ (e.g. ‘Professor’, ‘Assistant Lecturer’) be revised?
- A5. *Paragraph 41 (b) of the Guidance Notes stipulates that “justification will be sought for staff carrying titles that are significantly different from the standard ones for Categories ‘A’ to ‘I’ (e.g. ‘research officer’, ‘director’) who are nevertheless included”, thus a channel has already been provided for the consideration of staff members who have titles different from the staff categories as defined for the purpose of CDCF.*
- Q6. Would staff category “M” (i.e. CDCF Grade “Senior Technical Research staff”) be included if the staff member carries an “academic” title such as Research Assistant Professor?
- A6. *As paragraph 38 of the Guidance Notes has clearly stated, “the RAE 2006 will adhere to the same general principle of covering only core*

*academic staff... correspond to Staff Categories ‘A’ to ‘I’ as defined for the purpose of CDCF.” Staff category “M” (i.e. CDCF Grade “Senior Technical Research staff”) would not be included even if they carry an “academic” title such as Research Assistant Professor.*

- Q7. Would academics at the Lecturer/Instructor grades who are expected to carry heavy teaching loads and are not required to do research be excluded in RAE 2006?
- A7. *Paragraph 41 of the Guidance Notes states that “inclusion of staff should only make reference to their job categories, and not to whether they are research active.” RAE 2006 will only cover staff carrying titles in Categories ‘A’ to ‘I’. Whether the staff carry heavy teaching load or not does not constitute an issue in affecting their eligibility. In addition, if the staff concerned is not required to do research, then they may not need to submit anything for the assessment, but they should be counted in the determination of T (paragraph 33 of the Guidance Notes).*
- Q8. Would staff members who are on no-pay leave during the 24-month period that is used to determine staff eligibility be included?
- A8. *According to paragraph 37(a) of the Guidance Notes, staff member must “hold a paid appointment at the institution concerned for a continuous period of twenty-four months or more covering the specified census date (31 December 2005), provided that the beginning of the employment start date was no later than 1 January 2005”. Therefore, if the academic staff concerned does not hold a paid appointment for a continuous period of not less than twenty-four months due to no-pay leave, he/she would not be covered by the Exercise.*
- Q9. If an academic staff member who is already tenured, i.e. having an appointment exceeding 24 months, is approved for a no-pay period that covers the census date, will he/she be included in the RAE?
- A9. *If the staff is not holding a paid position at the institution on the census date (i.e. 31 December 2005) due to no-pay leave, he/she will not be covered by the Exercise.*

Q10. For staff members who have been working and contributing to their departments / faculties for the bulk of the period between 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2005, but will be retiring before the census date of 31 December 2005, will they be eligible for the Exercise?

A10. *As paragraph 37(a) of the Guidance Notes states, for staff members to be counted, they must be holding a “paid appointment at the institution concerned for a continuous period of twenty-four months or more covering the specific census date (i.e. 31 December 2005), provided that the beginning of the employment date was no later than 1 January 2005.” Therefore, for staff members who are retiring in 2004/2005 and will not be holding a paid employment on the census date, they will not be covered by the RAE 2006. We need to draw our line somewhere.*

Q11. Does paragraph 37 (b) of the Guidance Notes (i.e. eligibility requirement of academic staff) refer to both part-time and full-time staff members?

A11. *Yes, both part-time and full-time staff cannot hold concurrent paid positions at other institutions under paragraph 37(b) of the Guidance Notes. As set out in paragraph 40, part time staff who are not employed by another institution are counted on a fractional basis.*

### ***(III) Assessment Period***

Q1. It would not be fair for those staff members who had produced output items that fall in the three-year gap of 1999 to 2001, since their output items had not been assessed in RAE 1999 and would not be assessed in RAE 2006. This is especially true for Humanities subjects, since the output would require a prolonged duration to generate. Can a remedy be provided for this situation?

A1. *The UGC has carefully deliberated this issue and considered that since the purpose of the RAE is to take a snapshot of institutions’ latest research performance, the assessment period should be maintained. As a compromise and in heeding academics’ concern, the RAG proposed and the UGC agreed that each eligible staff could submit a maximum number of six items in the following manner at their discretion -*

*(a) four regular items within the assessment years (i.e. 1.1.2002 to 31.12.2005), one regular item within the gap years (i.e. 1.1.1999 to 31.12.2001), and one exceptional item before the assessment year period (i.e. prior to 1.1.2002); or*

(b) five regular items within the assessment years (i.e. 1.1.2002 to 31.12.2005), and one regular item within the gap years (i.e. 1.1.1999 to 31.12.2001).

*Please see paragraph 46 of the Guidance Notes for details.*

Q2. Will RAE 2006 accept research output items produced before 1999?

A2. *Each eligible staff may submit not more than one exceptional item prior to 1.1.2001. In this connection, he / she may submit one exceptional item before 1999 as well. However, to avoid double counting, re-submission of past RAE items is not allowed.*

#### **(IV) Cost Centres**

Q1. Previously Department X was evaluated under Cost Centre B. Can this Department be evaluated under Cost Centre A?

A1. *Institutions have full flexibility as to how and where they wish to map their departments to which cost centres.*

Q2. Some of the current cost centres include disciplines that should warrant new and separate cost centres be formed, to recognize the importance of the disciplines. Can this be done?

A2. *Whether a discipline has its own cost centre is a categorization matter and not a matter of whether the discipline is being viewed as important / not important. All disciplines, whether they have their own cost centres or not, are viewed as equally important by the UGC. The present classification of cost centres is the result of the consultation exercise held with the institutions on the Common Data Collection Format (CDCF) ended in February 2005.*

#### **(V) Assessment Mechanism**

Q1. Would the role and mission of an institution be fully incorporated and factored into the exercise, especially in the research index calculation model?

A1. *The role and mission of an institution will not per se be factored into the assessment process. This is because the RAE 2006 is an assessment of*

*research performance, not an assessment of the institution's performance against its role. The performance of institutions against role will be reflected in the Performance and Role Related Funding Scheme.*

Q2. Would the assessment be based on the US-biased international journal lists?

A2. *Paragraph 77 of the Guidance Notes has already stated that “**the panels will be instructed not to adopt a mechanical approach during the assessment**”. The assessment will be carefully discussed by individual panels based on the characteristics of each panel and will not mechanically based on international journal lists.*

Q3. Would the issue of local relevance be seriously and properly addressed in the assessment? Will credit be given to research that relates to local context and will the assessment criteria and membership of the Panel take care of the local relevance of research?

A3. *Paragraph 73 of the Guidance Notes states that “in the case of publications or other outputs of a local nature, the panel will need to assess whether the item represents a contribution to the work of the international research community in terms of its intellectual content, as well as rigour of process and methodology.” Paragraph 74 of the Guidance Notes also stipulates that – “**A distinction should be made between (a) a publication that is local because it addresses local issues, and (b) a publication that is local because it does not meet the standards of rigour and scholarship expected internationally in the mainstream of that discipline. In the former case, the item will not be discounted; in the latter, it will be.**” The nature and diversity of the disciplines would also be taken into account when Panel members are recruited.*

Q4. Would the comparability of standards, including the standard of handling co-authored items, be maintained across the 13 subject panels?

A4. *As stated in paragraph 32 of the Guidance Notes, “**all subject panels will work to the same threshold definition although they will have to exercise their judgment with due regard for the nature and culture in different disciplines**”. In addition, paragraph 75 of the Guidance Notes states that “**Individual RAE panels will attempt to decide their own thresholds, calibrate with one and other, and consider common working procedures as soon as they are formed.**” Furthermore,*

*guidelines will also be provided to Panel Members to establish a set of common ground rules on the assessment, and be mounted on the UGC's web at –*

<http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/publication/prog/rae/rae.htm>

*as part of the effort to enhance transparency of the process of the RAE 2006.*

- Q5. Could each researcher be allowed to make a personal statement which will not take up more than one A4 page, to supplement the researcher's publications record?
- A5. *As indicated in the paragraph 61 (c) and 62 of the Guidance Notes, staff members may submit “documentary evidence to demonstrate the impact of the research outputs” which “is limited to one A4 page”.*
- Q6. Research assessment should be informed by performance indicators other than published outputs and well-conceived strategies. Would additional appendices be allowed to provide elaboration of the research plans and strategies formulated at the cost centre level?
- A6. *Paragraph 51 (b) of the Guidance Notes has already allowed “other input that may or may not be in publishable form”. Research plans and strategies formulated at cost centre level can be included in Table 1 of the Guidance Notes by an appropriate representative from the institution as stated in paragraph 36 of the Notes.*
- Q7. Would a mechanistic approach of assessment be used? Would suitable criteria be used to assess Arts and Humanities subjects rather than by using parameters that are predominantly science-based, such as impact factors and citation indices?
- A7. *As indicated in paragraph 77 of the Guidance Notes, “the panels will be instructed not to adopt a mechanical approach during the assessment”. Paragraph 79 also states that “all panels will receive training before the actual assessment process begins, and will be invited to state in writing, for dissemination afterwards, the standards and criteria they have used, and a description of how these have been applied.”*
- Q8. Regarding paragraphs 71-74 of the Guidance Notes, please clarify the concept of ‘mainstream’ in the principles of ‘international excellence’ and ‘international vs. local’.

- A8. *Paragraph 74 states that international excellence “should not be equated with output items published outside of Hong Kong or the region; rather it is intended that evaluation should be made with reference to the best international norms in the mainstream of that discipline or sub-discipline. It is possible that in some particular disciplines, such norms are set by output items published in Hong Kong or the region.” This paragraph attempts to present the message that international excellence should not be equated with where the output items are published, be it in Hong Kong or not in Hong Kong; rather, the evaluation should be made with reference to the best international norms in the mainstream of that discipline or sub-discipline. The word “mainstream” has not been intended to describe or to categorize the output to be evaluated, but rather to describe how the output items should be evaluated. RAE 2006 does not classify research output items into mainstream or sidestream.*
- Q9. Could an academic book published between 2001 and 2002 be counted as one exceptional research output?
- A9. *According to paragraph 60 of the Guidance Notes, individual staff may submit up to one exceptional item produced at any time prior to 1 January 2002 if considered appropriate. In this connection, an academic book published before 1 January 2002 can be counted as one exceptional research output provided that the book had not been submitted in previous RAEs. It can also be submitted as a regular item if it was published in the gap years (i.e. 1.1.1999 to 31.12.2001) in accordance with paragraph 46 of the Guidance Notes.*
- Q10. Can more than one exceptional item be submitted?
- A10. *As indicated in paragraphs 46 and 60 of the Guidance Notes, only one exceptional item can be submitted.*
- Q11. Would exceptional items be treated equally as ‘ordinary’ items?
- A11. *Exceptional items would be treated in the same way as in RAE 1999, i.e. exceptional items should be “works of great impact” (paragraph 60 of the Guidance Notes).*

Q12. How would research collaboration among institutions be assessed?

A12. *Inter-institutional research collaboration is recognized through allowing for co-authored output items, whereas inter-disciplinary collaboration within the same institution should be evident through the 'fte' distribution among different cost centres.*

Q13. For papers that have been accepted for publication, it is common that journals, in their acceptance letters to the authors, require them to make minor corrections to the concerned papers. The requirement for minor corrections to the concerned paper is, however, not a condition whatsoever for its publication. Therefore, can the phrase, “without need for further amendments of any kind”, of current paragraph 51(a)(ii) of the Guidance Notes be rephrased to take account of this minor correction?

A13. *The UGC has taken note of this concern and has amended paragraph 51(a)(ii) of the Guidance Notes to accept output items which are not yet published, but officially accepted for publication without any prior condition for its publication.*

Q14. Would the outcome of propriety research, if they are showcased in exhibitions or demonstrations, be considered as a kind of non-traditional output and allowed to be submitted for assessment?

A14. *The UGC has amended Paragraph 52 of the Guidance Notes to allow the submission of output items of exhibitions and demonstrations relating to proprietary research which are (i) accessible to the public and the profession; (ii) non-traditional output for assessment; and (iii) contain enough information for evaluation.*

Q15. In paragraphs 16 and 71 of the Guidance Notes, “raised” threshold standard was mentioned. What does “raised” threshold standard mean?

A15. *As stated in paragraph 75 of the Guidance Notes, “**Individual RAE panels will attempt to decide their own thresholds...**”, therefore the specific definition of the “raised standards” will be decided by the individual panels based on the special nature of the discipline.*

**(VI) Panel Structure**

Q1. Would the assessment be undertaken by experts knowledgeable in that discipline?

A1. *Panel Convenors and their deputies will be instructed to nominate panel members who have sufficient expertise in the areas to be assessed. In addition, since panel member nominations are mainly provided by the eight UGC-funded institutions, a formal and proper channel has been in place for the institutions to recommend those experts whom they consider appropriate for assessing their submissions.*

Q2. Would the proportion of non-local members on the review panels be increased?

A2. *Yes, the UGC is prepared to increase the number of overseas panel.*

Q3. Would sub-panels be formed?

A3. *There is no restriction as stipulated in the Guidance Notes on whether the panel should or should not form sub-panels. Suggestions related to sub-panels by institutions have been forwarded to the relevant Panel Convenors for their consideration.*

Q4. Would the process of appointing subject panel members be made transparent, e.g. the criteria for appointment, the process of decision making and the names of the parties/persons who will be making the decision?

A4. *Panel members are nominated by the eight-UGC funded institutions, and selected by the respective Panel Convenors and their deputies in consultation with the Convenor of the Research Ad Hoc Group (RAG) and the UGC Secretariat, based on the General Guidelines for Panel Convenors on Panel Formation endorsed by the UGC. The General Guidelines for Panel Convenors on Panel Formation outlines the criteria for panel member appointment, and is available for public's information on the UGC web as follows: –*

<http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/publication/prog/rae/rae.htm>.

Q5. How do you select Panel Convenors and Deputy Panel Convenors?

A5. *The Panel Convenors and their deputies are selected based on the following guiding principles endorsed by the UGC –*

- (a) expertise in the related fields;*
- (b) impartiality;*
- (c) open-mindedness;*
- (d) leadership; and*
- (e) to the extent possible, RAE experience.*

**(VII) Other General Questions**

Q1. Will an open workshop be held to enable academic staff to ask questions related to the technical details of the Exercise?

A1. *This Q&A document has been prepared to enhance the institutions' understanding on the Exercise. This Q&A document is posted on the UGC web at:-*

<http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/publication/prog/rae/rae.htm>.

*Further enquiries can be addressed to the UGC Secretariat (Mr Anthony Chan, Assistant Secretary-General (Research), at 2844 9916 or email at [achan@ugc.edu.hk](mailto:achan@ugc.edu.hk), or Ms Wendy Wong, Senior Research Administrator, at 2844 9917 or email at [wendywong@ugc.edu.hk](mailto:wendywong@ugc.edu.hk) ). Two Carnegie workshops\* will also be held for institutions on 24 January 2006.*

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\* Two similar workshops will be held in the morning and afternoon of 24 January 2006. It is envisaged that four institutions will join the first workshop and the remaining four the second workshop.