

**Research Assessment Exercise 2020  
Framework and Guidance Notes**

**Supplementary Note  
on UGC's Deliberations on Comments Received during Consultation**

**(a) Mapping of units of assessment (UoAs) and research areas to Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) panels**

The list of mapping of UoAs was first announced in May 2017 in the proposed Framework for the RAE 2020 for consultation with universities. Having duly considered universities comments and suggestions on the mapping, UGC incorporated suitable modifications to the list for announcement in the finalised Framework in October 2017. During the subsequent consultation on the Guidance Notes and General Panel Guidelines, some universities had raised again comments/suggestions on the mapping lists of UoAs and respective research areas, UGC had thoroughly considered each and every piece of suggestions. Having collectively considered the pros and cons on further re-mapping of the UoAs and research areas vis-à-vis the various measures established in the Guidance Notes to help deal with disciplinary differences in the assessment, such as flexibility of allowing panels to form sub-panels and the measures established for handling of inter-disciplinary research, UGC affirmed upholding the mapping lists in the Framework and Guidance Notes at its meetings in January and May 2018.

2. Separately, universities also raised comments relevant to composition of RAE panels of specific disciplinary areas. Some examples are the inclusion of inter-disciplinary expertise in RAE Panels, the requisite expertise to take up the role of inter-disciplinary champion and the representation in RAE panel to take care of the multi-disciplinary and translational nature of knowledge in pharmacy. Regarding the inter-disciplinary champion, the UGC recognised that his/her role is to ensure thorough and appropriate assessment of inter-disciplinary submissions, and he/she would not necessarily be an expert on the content of the submissions themselves. The Secretariat had relayed universities' comments to the relevant RAE Panel Convenors for consideration in the shortlisting of nominees during panel formation. Feedback relating to panel-specific assessment criteria will also be conveyed to individual RAE panels for information.

## **(b) Staff eligibility criteria and related views**

3. The staff eligibility criteria in the RAE 2020 largely follow those in the RAE 2014 and were announced for consultation with universities in the Framework in May 2017. Having considered universities comments raised in the consultation, the staff eligibility criteria were finalised for announcement in the Framework in October 2017 as follows –

- (a) holding a full-time paid appointment at a UGC-funded university for a continuous period of at least 36 months covering the census date, i.e. 30 September 2019, provided that the employment start date was no later than 1 September 2017; and
- (b) wholly funded by the university proper\* for degree or higher degree work within staff grades of “Professor” to “Assistant Lecturer”, or corresponding to Staff Grades “A” to “I” as defined for the purpose of the UGC Common Data Collection Format (CDCF).

\* Excluding schools/arms of the continuing education and professional training and other analogous organisations.

4. Despite finalisation of staff eligibility criteria in the Framework, further views, whether new or repeated, have been received in subsequent consultation on the Guidance Notes, such as part-time staff should be eligible for submission and staff on teaching or specialist tracks should be regarded as ineligible in the exercise. UGC had given due consideration to those comments and decided to retain the provisions in the Framework having regard to –

- (a) the staff eligibility criteria in RAE 2020 largely follow the principles and arrangements adopted in previous RAE;
- (b) universities had been consulted on this in the draft Framework and their views had been duly considered before the Framework was finalised in October 2017;
- (c) the inclusion of all eligible staff in the RAE and whether such staff would make submissions for assessment are separate issues;
- (d) the requirement of full-time appointment of staff is in line with the eligibility requirement for applying research funding from the Research Grants Council and the arrangement adopted in RAE 2014;

- (e) with caution on any unintended behavioural changes or “gaming” in the sector, only full-time academic staff will be eligible for making submission of research outputs. Part-time staff may be included in the universities’ environment and impact submissions; and
- (f) without prejudice to the institutional autonomy with respect to nomenclature of staff grade and titles, universities should make reference to the prevailing CDCF Guidance Notes on the definition of academic staff on staff grade classification.

5. The UGC affirmed the principle that all academic staff who meet the eligibility criteria should be taken into account in the RAE 2020, irrespective of whether the eligible staff engage in teaching and/or research.

**(c) Whether differences among submitting units/universities in terms of staff size, history, funding scale should be taken into account in the assessment of research impact and environment**

6. There have been comments during the consultation on the draft Guidance Notes and the General Panel Guidelines that in making assessment on research impact and environment, consideration should be given to the scale of research infrastructure/staff size, historical funding patterns or environment history. Relevant comments were raised by two universities that the number of graduates of research postgraduate (RPg) programmes should not be an indicator for research environment as majority of RPg places are allocated to large scale universities.

7. UGC’s deliberation in this regard had been elaborated in paragraph 2.18 of the Guidance Notes. UGC highly values and appreciates wide diversity within the sector. The different roles, missions, discipline profiles and histories of different universities are part of the context of the universities. It should be emphasised that the RAE evaluates the quality of universities’ submissions based on their merits according to international standards. Differences among submitting universities/units in terms of staff size, resources and histories will not form part of the assessment. Rather, due regard to the differences should be given when interpreting the RAE results.

8. Submissions in respect of impact and environment should be assessed solely on their merits with no consideration given to the differences among the submitting universities/units in terms of staff size, resources, histories, and there should be no discounting/crediting factor

arising from the career stage and staff profile information of individual universities/units.

9. The assessment of the environment element is proposed to be a qualitative assessment with reference to international standards, and does not necessarily consider the environment data in a mechanical way. Universities may as well depict the commonalities and dynamics among faculties and departments within the submitting unit, and show how a good research environment is provided in the submission. As scale alone does not inevitably entail a good environment, universities will have to demonstrate how they ensure a good environment regardless of their scale (whether large or small).

#### **(d) Arrangement on co-authored research outputs**

10. During the consultation of the draft Guidance Notes and General Panel Guidelines, there have been views concerning co-authored research outputs by one or more researchers from the same university. The UGC and its sub-committees had thorough deliberations on the submission arrangement. Due consideration has been given to UGC's support to collaborations within and across universities on the one hand and the need to minimise the risk of game playing on the other if multiple submissions of the same output from the same university were allowed.

11. While noting that the original proposal would maintain the continuity from RAE 2014, UGC had also explored other options. After due consideration, UGC maintained the view that there was a need to avoid double-counting of the same item submitted by the same university. Moreover, with new parameters such as impact and environment in the RAE 2020, it was important to refrain from over-engineering or over-complicating the exercise. The arrangement on co-authorship was considered to be the most feasible measure in operational terms. With due consideration of relevant stakeholders' views as well as the principles on staff eligibility and portability of research outputs as published in the Framework, the UGC affirmed the decision of maintaining the arrangement and provisions on co-authorship in the Guidance Notes.

#### **(e) Period of underpinning research for capturing research impact**

12. The period of underpinning research for the impact element of RAE 2020, i.e. 1 January 2000 to 30 September 2019, had been set out in the Framework in October 2017 for consultation. As there had been general acceptance from all universities during the consultation, UGC had endorsed it in the Framework for announcement. While individual

universities had raised different views on the period of underpinning research in subsequent consultation on the draft Guidance Notes and General Panel Guidelines, UGC had further deliberated on the different suggestions from universities at its meetings in January and May 2018 and resolved to maintain the period of underpinning research in the Framework.

UGC Secretariat  
July 2018