# Research Assessment Exercise 2020 Panel 1 – Biology Panel-specific Guidelines on Assessment Criteria and Working Methods

(September 2018)

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#### Introduction

- 1. This document sets out the assessment criteria and working methods that the Biology Panel of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2020 will apply. It should be read alongside the General Panel Guidelines of the exercise. The provisions set out in this document serve as further elaboration and amplification on the assessment criteria and working methods as applied to the Biology Panel. In areas where no additional information has been specified, the provisions in the General Panel Guidelines will prevail and apply in the assessment process of the Panel. These guidelines do not replace or supersede the requirements for submissions that are set out in the Guidance Notes for the RAE 2020.
- 2. This document describes the criteria and methods for assessing submissions in the Biology Panel. It provides guidance on the type of information required in the submissions. It also provides a single, consistent set of criteria that will be applied by the Panel and sub-group(s)/sub-panel(s), if any, when undertaking the assessment having regard to any differences in the nature of disciplines of respective units of assessment (UoAs) under purview. It also provides a common approach to the working methods applied within the Panel.

## **Section A: Submissions**

#### **UoAs under the Panel**

3. The Biology Panel will assess universities' submissions from the following UoAs –

#### Code UoAs

- biological sciences (incl. environmental biology, biotechnology, agriculture & food science, veterinary studies)
- 2 pre-clinical studies
- 4. The Panel expects to receive submissions whose primary research focus falls within the remit of the above UoAs. The UoAs under the Panel's remit cover the full spectrum of the basic and applied biology of all organisms, including basic science underpinning clinical research in medical or veterinary science.

## **Inter-disciplinary Research**

- 5. The Panel also recognises that individual UoAs do not have firm or rigidly definable boundaries, and that certain aspects of research are naturally inter-disciplinary or span the boundaries between individual UoAs, whether within the Panel or across panels. The Panel will adopt the arrangements for assessing inter-disciplinary submissions as set out in paragraphs 39-40 of the General Panel Guidelines.
- 6. Much research in biology is inter-disciplinary and as a result the Panel expects to assess inter-disciplinary research across the full spectrum of sub-disciplines in UoAs 1 and 2.

# Assignment of Eligible Academic Staff in Each UoA

- 7. Pursuant to paragraphs 7-11 of the General Panel Guidelines, the Biology Panel does not expect to receive information on sub-disciplines in relation to eligible academic staff and their respective research outputs.
- 8. It is critical that research outputs are assessed by the most appropriate panel. If a panel suspects any anomaly regarding universities' assignment of eligible academic staff (and therefore their outputs) to research area(s) and UoA(s) under its remit, it will follow the procedures

for re-assignment of the eligible staff according to paragraphs 10-11 of the General Panel Guidelines. The Panel also recognises its responsibility to handle submissions arising from any re-assignment of eligible academic staff to the Panel.

## University's Research Strategy Statement

- 9. Following paragraphs 2.16-2.18 and Appendix B of the Guidance Notes and paragraph 15 of the General Panel Guidelines, the Research Strategy Statement submitted by each university will provide contextual information for the Panel when assessing the submissions. These Statements will not be assessed, but may help the Panel to understand better the material that is presented in each submission, particularly insofar as UoAs refer to the overall position of their university. The Statements will also help the University Grants Committee (UGC) when viewing the quality profiles of the universities as a whole upon completion of the RAE 2020.
- 10. (Template paragraph deleted)

## **Section B: Assessment Criteria: Research Outputs**

# **Output Types**

- 11. The Biology Panel will consider the eligibility of research outputs as described in paragraphs 16-18 of the General Panel Guidelines, paragraphs 5.7-5.11 and Appendix F of the Guidance Notes.
- 12. The Panel will assess the quality of each eligible output on its own merits and not in terms of its publication category, medium or language of publication. The Panel will examine each item in detail and will not assess outputs mechanistically according to the publication venue. The Panel recognises that there can be work of the highest quality in various output forms, and no distinction will be made between types of output submitted nor whether the output has been made available electronically or in a physical form.
- 13. Forms of research outputs that are admissible and specifically relevant to the Biology Panel include the following examples. This should not be regarded as an exhaustive list. Equally, there is no implication of priority or importance in the ordering of examples in this list
  - books, book chapters and research monographs.

- published conference papers and reports.
- new materials, devices, products and processes.
- patents awarded or published patent applications.
- papers published in peer-reviewed journals.
- articles posted on open access pre-print repositories provided that they are not submitted as published.
- review articles where these incorporate new research, new insights, or new hypotheses.
- software, computer code and algorithms.
- standards documents.
- technical reports, including commissioned advisory reports.
- 14. Research outputs will be assessed for the quality of original research they include. The Panel will accept the submission of review articles only where they contain a significant component of unpublished research or new insight. Such outputs will be judged only on their original research or novelty of insight.
- 15. The Panel will consider subsequent editions of previous work only where they contain significant new research. Material that appeared in editions published before 1 October 2013 will not be assessed.

#### **Double-weighting of Research Outputs**

- 16. Paragraphs 29-31 of the General Panel Guidelines indicate that in exceptional cases a submitting university may request that outputs of extended scale and scope be double-weighted in the assessment. Given the publication patterns in UoAs 1 and 2 this Panel does not expect to receive any items proposed for double-weighting, however.
- 17. If requesting double-weighting of an output universities should submit a statement in not more than 100 words, explaining in what ways the output is of sufficiently extended scale and scope to justify the claim.

#### **Co-authored/Co-produced Outputs**

18. The Panel affirms the principles and arrangements on assessing co-authored/co-produced research outputs as set out in paragraphs 32-34 of the General Panel Guidelines.

19. The Panel will consider co-authorship to be a normal element of research activity in UoAs 1 and 2 and for outputs with less than eight co-authors the Panel will accept that all co-authors have made a significant contribution to the research process leading to the output concerned. In the case of an output with eight or more co-authors the university should explain in less than 100 words the contribution of the submitting author unless s/he is a first or co-first author, or a last or co-last author.

# **Non-traditional Outputs**

20. The Panel will handle research outputs in non-traditional form according to paragraphs 35-37 of the General Panel Guidelines. The Panel expects to receive additional information about each non-traditional output in terms of its novelty, method used to ensure academic rigour in the production of the output, deliverables, and dissemination method. The Panel does not expect to receive outputs in a non-traditional form, however.

# Criteria and Quality Levels for Assessing Research Outputs

- 21. Panel members will use their professional judgement with reference to international standards in assessing research outputs.
- 22. In assessing outputs, the Panel will look for evidence of originality, significance and rigour, and will grade each output into one of the five categories of quality level as set out in paragraph 19 of the General Panel Guidelines. The generic description of the quality levels as set out in paragraph 20 of the General Panel Guidelines will be applied in the Panel's assessment.
- 23. The Biology Panel provides the following amplifications on the criteria of assessing research outputs
  - originality: will be understood as the extent to which the output introduces a new way of thinking about a subject or a new methodology.
  - significance: will be understood as the extent to which the output has exerted, or has the potential to exert, an influence on the academic field.
  - rigour: will be understood in terms of the intellectual precision, robustness and appropriateness of the concepts and methodologies deployed within the output.

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24. In addition, the Panel provides the following advice on their understanding of the quality definitions adopted for assessing research outputs –

The Panel will take into consideration the following characteristics in particular –

- scientific rigour and excellence with regard to the design, research method, execution and analysis of the work.
- whether or not the output has been subject to peer-review.
- significant addition to knowledge and to the conceptual framework of the field.
- potential and actual significance of the research both within and beyond the field concerned.
- the scale, challenge and logistical difficulty posed by the research.
- the logical coherence of argument.
- contribution to theory-building.
- significance of work to advance knowledge, skills, understanding and scholarship in theory, practice, education, management and/or policy.
- significance for professional development in veterinary science.

#### **Metrics/Citation Data**

- 25. Pursuant to paragraph 24 of the General Panel Guidelines, the Panel acknowledges that metrics and citation data may serve as advisory or secondary information, and that they should not be used in any algorithmic or deterministic way for the evaluation of research quality.
- 26. The Biology Panel will examine each output in detail during the assessment. The Panel may use citation data to inform its assessment of individual items. These data will not be used in any algorithmic or deterministic way for the evaluation of research quality. The Panel is aware of the limitations of citation data, their variability within and between disciplines, that some excellent work takes time to demonstrate its full achievements and that citation frequency depends on year of publication.

#### **Additional Information on Research Outputs**

27. Other than the information required on research outputs as specified in the Guidance Notes, and unless specifically required by the Panel during the assessment process, no other information should be provided. The Panel will take no account of any such information if submitted.

## Section C: Assessment Criteria: Research Impact

## **Range of Impacts**

- 28. The Biology Panel will accept submissions on research impacts that meet the generic definition and criteria as set out in paragraphs 47-48 of the General Panel Guidelines.
- 29. The Panel will assess the quality of all eligible impact submissions based on their merits on equal footing with no consideration given to the differences among submitting universities/units in terms of staff size, resources and histories. The Panel recognises that research within its remit may have impact in various ways and various spheres whether locally, regionally or internationally.
- 30. Examples are provided to illustrate the range of potential impacts from research across the Biology Panel in <u>Table A</u>. These examples are indicative only, and are not exhaustive or exclusive. Equally, there is no implication of priority or importance in the ordering of examples in the list.
- 31. Universities are expected to submit their strongest impact cases and not to align submitted cases specifically with the particular types of impact listed, as an impact case may describe more than one type of impact, for example a drug may generate both health and economic impact, or an environmental study may increase both biodiversity and tourism.

Table A: Examples of Impact

Impacts on the economy where the beneficiaries	•	Gains in productivity have been realised as a result of research-led practices.
may include industry and society	•	A spin-out or new business has been created, established its viability, or generated revenue or profits.
	•	Development of new products or processes.

Impacts on the environment where the beneficiaries may include tourism, agriculture, fisheries, government, and society	<ul> <li>The management of an environmental risk or hazard has changed.</li> <li>The management or conservation of natural resources (e.g. water) has been influenced or changed.</li> <li>Practices or policies affecting biodiversity have changed.</li> </ul>
Impacts on health where the beneficiaries may include patient groups, industry, and society	<ul> <li>A new diagnostic or medical technology has been adopted.</li> <li>A new drug or drug target has been licenced by industry.</li> <li>Decisions by health service or regulatory authority have been informed by research.</li> </ul>
Impacts on public policy and services where the beneficiaries may include non- governmental organisations (NGOs), government, and society	<ul> <li>Policy decisions or changes to legislation, regulations, or guidelines have been informed by research.</li> <li>Policy or public debate has been stimulated or informed by research evidence.</li> <li>The work of public or NGOs has been influenced.</li> </ul>
Impacts on quality of life and welfare where the beneficiaries may include farming, fisheries, food industry, and society	<ul> <li>Improved food safety regulations.</li> <li>Improved standards of animal welfare.</li> <li>Improved agricultural practices.</li> </ul>
Impacts on education and public understanding of science where the beneficiaries may include educational institutions, media, and society	<ul> <li>Changes in school curriculum.</li> <li>Educational programmes for broadcast media have been influenced.</li> <li>The development of new museum exhibits has been informed.</li> </ul>

(Note: Other examples of research impact as assessed in other jurisdictions may be accessible online such as <a href="http://results.ref.ac.uk/Results/SelectUoa">http://results.ref.ac.uk/Results/SelectUoa</a> from the United Kingdom.)

## **Impact Overview Statement**

- 32. Following paragraphs 7.7 (a) and (b), 7.8 and Appendix G of the Guidance Notes and also paragraph 49 of the General Panel Guidelines, submitting units are required to describe how they have sought to enable and/or facilitate achievement of impact arising from their research during the assessment period, and how they are developing and adapting their plans to ensure that they continue to do so. This is distinct from the environment overview statement, which should describe how the units support the conduct and production of research.
- 33. The impact overview statement should include relevant illustrative explanations with examples and traceable references where possible, rather than broad, general statements. The Panel expects the impact overview statement to include
  - context: non-academic user groups, beneficiaries or audiences for the unit's research; main types of impacts specifically relevant to the unit's research, and how these relate to the range of research activities or research groups in the unit.
  - approach to impact: the unit's approach to interacting with non-academic users, beneficiaries, or audiences; its approach and mechanism to support the achievement of impacts from its research; this could include but is not limited to indicators such as participation in knowledge exchange schemes; industrial training provided or consultancy undertaken.
  - strategy and plans: how the unit is developing a strategy for achieving impact including its goals and plans for supporting, rewarding, and enabling impact from its current and future research.
  - relationship to the case studies: how the selected case studies relate to the submitting unit's approach to achieving impact; how particular case studies exemplify aspects of the unit's approach or they have informed the development of the unit's approach. The Panel recognises that impact case studies are underpinned by research over a period longer than the assessment period and that individual case studies may not directly relate to, or necessarily arise from, the unit's current approach.

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## **Impact Case Study(ies)**

- 34. Following paragraphs 7.7 (c) and (d), 7.9-7.10 and Appendix H of the Guidance Notes and also paragraph 51 of the General Panel Guidelines, submitting units are required to provide a narrative account in each case study that should be coherent, clearly explaining the relationship between the research and impact, and the nature of the changes or benefits arising.
- 35. Each impact case study should include appropriate evidence and indicators that support the claims for the impact achieved, including who and what has/have benefitted. Individual case studies may draw on various evidence and indicators that may take different forms depending on the type of impact.
- 36. Examples are provided in <u>Table B</u> to illustrate potential evidence or indicators that may be mostly relevant to the Biology Panel. These examples are not intended to be exhaustive. Equally, there is no implication of priority or importance in the ordering of examples in the list.

Table B: Examples of Evidence or Indicators for Impact

Quantitative indicators	<ul> <li>Quantitative data relating to cost-effectiveness.</li> <li>Performance measures (e.g. sales, turnover, profits associated).</li> <li>Audience or attendance figures.</li> </ul>
Documentary evidence	<ul> <li>Documented changes to public policy / legislation / regulations / guidelines / standards.</li> <li>Evidence of policy or public debate.</li> <li>New professional codes and standards.</li> <li>Application or incorporation in professional best practice, training and continuing development materials.</li> <li>Commercial adoption of new technology, process, knowledge, or concept.</li> <li>Licences awarded or products brought to market.</li> </ul>
Independent testimony	• Formal acknowledgements of and/or evaluations by relevant beneficiaries, bodies and organisations.

Reviews and citations	•	Citations	and	reviews	outsi	ide	the
		academic	litera	ature, e.ş	g. in	po	licy,
		regulatory, practice documents.					
	•	Citations in media.					

(Note: Other examples of evidence or indicators for research impact in other jurisdictions may be accessible online such as <a href="http://results.ref.ac.uk/Results/SelectUoa">http://results.ref.ac.uk/Results/SelectUoa</a> from the United Kingdom.)

- 37. The Panel provides the following advice on particular aspects of impact case studies
  - Evidence supporting each impact case should be verifiable.
  - The link to underpinning research should be clear.

## **Underpinning Research**

- 38. The Panel acknowledges the level of quality required for research underpinning impact cases, i.e. equivalent to at least 2 star (2\*) or international standing, as stipulated in the General Panel Guidelines. Impact case studies should specify indicators of the quality of the underpinning research such as outputs or peer-reviewed funding. Where necessary, the Panel will review the outputs concerned in order to ensure the quality of the research is of at least 2 star (2\*).
- 39. Provided that the Panel is satisfied that the quality threshold has been met, the quality of the underpinning research will not be taken into account in the assessment of the quality of impact. Underpinning research referenced in a case study may also be submitted for assessment under the research output element. The evaluation of the outputs concerned under the impact element is a separate assessment only for assuring the threshold of underpinning research. In this case, the guidance on output types and criteria for assessing research outputs as stipulated in paragraphs 11-15, 21-24 above would apply.

# **Criteria and Quality Levels for Assessing Research Impact**

- 40. Panels will exercise their expert judgement in assessing the quality of each impact submission, and will not judge in terms of the type of research underpinning the impact cases.
- 41. In assessing impacts, the Panel will look for evidence of reach and significance, and will grade each impact submission as a whole and give a

rating using one or more of the five categories of quality level following paragraphs 53-55 of the General Panel Guidelines. In respect of the Biology Panel, the criteria of reach and significance will be understood as follows –

- reach: the extent and diversity of the communities, individuals, organisations that have benefitted or been positively affected from the impact. For example, the Panel will evaluate the extent to which society, communities, or individuals have benefitted from the adoption of a new food safety standard.
- significance: the degree of beneficial effects to policies, practices, perspectives or awareness of organisations, communities or individuals, constructive change to the prevention or reduction of harm, risk, or cost. For example, the Panel will evaluate the degree of constructive change to the prevention or reduction of harm, risk or cost from the adoption of a new food safety standard.
- 42. The Panel will make an overall judgement about the reach and significance of impacts, rather than assessing each criterion separately. The criteria will be applied in the assessment of the research impact regardless of the domain to which the impact relates. The quality standards for assessing research impact will be those indicated in paragraph 55 of the General Panel Guidelines.

## Section D: Assessment Criteria: Research Environment

#### **Research Environment**

- 43. The Biology Panel will accept submissions on research environment according to paragraphs 57-58 of the General Panel Guidelines. The Panel recognises that excellent research can be undertaken in a wide variety of research structures and environments and has no preformed view of the ideal size or organisational structure for a research environment. The Panel recognises the benefit of diversity within a research environment and will regard positively efforts to achieve this as indicated in paragraph 65 of the General Panel Guidelines. The Panel will assess each submission based on what has been presented in relation to the work of the submitting unit in providing and ensuring a good environment.
- 44. A research environment submission may relate either to a single coherent faculty or to multiple departments. In either case the submission

may depict the commonalities and dynamics within or between faculties and departments in the submitting unit, defining their prime activities, how they operate, and their main achievements.

#### **Environment Overview Statement**

- 45. Following paragraphs 9.6 (a) and (b), 9.7 and Appendix I of the Guidance Notes, and also paragraph 59 of the General Panel Guidelines, submitting units are required to describe how they have supported the conduct and production of research. This is distinct from the impact overview statement, which should describe how the units encourage and facilitate the achievement of research impact.
- 46. Within the terms of the Guidance Notes, the Biology Panel will expect in particular to see the following in the environment overview statement
  - overview: organisation and structure of the unit, which research groups are covered in the submission, and how research is structured across the submitting unit.
  - research strategy: evidence of the achievement of the strategic aims for research during the assessment period, and details of future strategic aims and goals for research; how these relate to the structure described above and how they will be taken forward; methods for monitoring attainment of targets; new and developing initiatives not yet producing visible outcomes but of strategic importance; identification of priority developmental areas for the unit, including research topics, funding streams, postgraduate research activity, facilities, staffing, administration and management.
  - people: staffing policy and evidence of its effectiveness; how individuals at the beginning of their research careers are being supported and integrated into the research culture of the submitting unit; information on postgraduate recruitment, training and support mechanisms; mechanisms by which standards of research quality and integrity are maintained, for example ethics procedures and authorship.
  - income: information on research funding portfolio; evidence of successful generation of research income; major and prestigious grant awards made by external bodies on a competitive basis.

- infrastructure and facilities: provision and operation of research infrastructure and facilities, including special equipment, library, technical support, space and facilities for research groups and research students; information on jointuniversity or cross-institution shared or collaborative use of research infrastructure.
- collaborations: support for and exemplars of research collaborations; mechanisms to promote collaborative research at local and international level; support for inter-disciplinary research collaborations; research collaboration with research users.
- esteem: prestigious/competitive research fellowships held by individual researchers; external prizes and awards in recognition of research achievement.
- contribution to the discipline or research base: exemplars of leadership in the academic community such as advisory board membership; participation in the peer-review process for grants committees or editorial boards.

#### **Environment Data**

- 47. Following paragraphs 9.6 (c) and (d), 9.8 and Appendix J of the Guidance Notes, and also paragraph 60 of the General Panel Guidelines, submitting units are required to provide environment data in conjunction with the environment overview statement. The Panel will consider the environment data within the context of the information provided in the environment overview statement, and within the context of the disciplines concerned.
- 48. Data on "staff employed by the university proper" and "graduates of research postgraduate programmes" will be used to inform the Panel's assessment in relation to "people" (section (3) (i) and (ii)). Data on "ongoing research grants/contracts" will be used to inform the Panel's assessment on "income" (section (4)). Additional quantitative data or indicators that are particularly relevant to the Panel are indicated in paragraph 46 above. Such additional information should be submitted within the appropriate section(s) of the environment overview statement.

#### Criteria and Quality Levels for Assessing Research Environment

49. Panels will exercise their expert judgement in assessing the merits of each environment submission, and will not judge automatically in terms

of the scale of research environment concerned.

- 50. In assessing environment, the Panel will consider research environment in terms of vitality and sustainability, including its contribution to the vitality and sustainability of the wider discipline or research base. The Panel will grade each environment submission with weighting attached to individual aspects as follows
  - strategy 10%
  - people 20%
  - income 20%
  - infrastructure 20%
  - collaboration 15%
  - esteem -5%
  - contribution to the discipline or research base 10%

The Panel will use one or more of the five categories of quality level as specified in paragraphs 62-64 of the General Panel Guidelines for assessing each aspect within the environment element and by aggregating assessments of individual aspects to form an overall assessment for each environment submission.

- 51. The Biology Panel provides the following amplifications to supplement the generic criteria for assessing research environment
  - vitality: the extent to which a unit provides an encouraging and facilitating environment for research, has an effective strategic plan, is engaged with the regional and international research community, is able to attract excellent postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers through a worldwide reputation.
  - sustainability: vision for the future and investment in people and infrastructure and, where appropriate for the subject area, the extent to which activity is supported by a portfolio of research funding.
- 52. The Panel will make an overall judgement about the vitality and sustainability of research environments, rather than assessing each criterion separately. The quality standards for assessing research environment will be those indicated in paragraph 64 of the General Panel Guidelines.

## **Section E : Working Methods**

## **Use of Sub-Group(s)/Sub-Panel(s)**

53. There will not be any sub-group or sub-panel formed under the Biology Panel. The final assessment and grading will be decided by the Panel as a whole.

#### **Allocation of Work in the Assessment Process**

- 54. The Convenor, consulting the Deputy Convenor and other panel members, as appropriate, will allocate work to members and, if necessary, impact assessors and/or external reviewers in light of their expertise and workload. In allocating the work, the Convenor will also take into account any potential conflicts of interest of respective panel members and assessors. All panel members will take account of the requirements of the General Panel Guidelines to ensure that the exercise is conducted fairly and equitably.
- 55. Panel members will examine the submitted outputs in detail, and put forward a recommendation to the Panel for a collective decision on the final grading. To ensure fairness and consistency, each research output will be assessed in detail by at least two members, one of whom should be a non-local member to the extent possible. For UoA(s) which is(are) only housed at one or two local universities, submissions will be assigned to at least one non-local member in order to ensure fair and impartial assessment. Final grading on research outputs will be decided by the Panel as a whole.
- 56. Subject to conflicts of interest of individual members, the impact and environment submissions will be assessed by members of the whole Panel and the final grading of individual submissions will be a collective decision of the Panel.

#### **Cross-Panel Referrals**

- 57. This Panel will follow the procedures in paragraphs 41-43 of the General Panel Guidelines when initiating referrals to other panels and assessing submissions cross-referred by another panel.
- 58. Generally, research on pedagogy and education issues submitted to this Panel will be assessed by panel members or external reviewers with expertise in pedagogy or cross-referred to Panel 13 Education.

59. Cross-panel referrals are envisaged in areas such as: physical geography, oceanography, optical methods, medicinal chemistry (to Panel 3 – Physical Sciences), clinical pharmacology (to Panel 2 – Health Sciences).

#### **External Advice**

60. This Panel will follow the procedure in paragraph 66 of the General Panel Guidelines when referral to external reviewers for expert advice becomes necessary for panel assessment. External reviews may be sought in the cases for which members of the Panel do not have the necessary expertise such as outputs in foreign language or niche research work.

#### **Trial Assessment**

61. With reference to paragraphs 89-91 of the General Panel Guidelines, the Panel will conduct a trial assessment using a sample of submissions selected from universities' submissions. These sample submissions will be assessed by all members of the Panel. Members will share among themselves any important observations in the assessment to ensure fairness and consistency in the actual assessment. Submissions used for the trial assessment will be assessed afresh during the main assessment period regardless of their assessment results during the trial. The Panel will decide on the sample size after the submissions are received.

# **Panel Feedback Report**

62. With reference to paragraph 71 and Appendices E and F of the General Panel Guidelines, the Panel will provide feedback to the UGC after the assessment process. Non-local panel members will be involved in offering comments for an impressionistic international comparison. The Convenor on behalf of the whole panel will submit the panel feedback report to the UGC by 10 November 2020.