

UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMITTEE

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Questions and Answers (Q&As)

The following questions (Q) and answers (A) provide supplementary information concerning the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2020 in general as well as the submissions and assessment process of the exercise. These Q&As, as grouped by categories below, do not replace or supersede the Framework, Guidance Notes, General Panel Guidelines, and Panel-Specific Guidelines on Assessment Criteria and Working Methods for the RAE 2020, which are promulgated and available on the University Grants Committee (UGC) website at <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/activity/research/rae/rae2020.html>. In the event of a discrepancy between these Q&As and the four promulgated documents, the precedence in the four promulgated documents shall prevail.

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[Update in June 2019: Numeric amendment to answer no. 29.

Update in February 2019: Clarifying amendments to answers no. 41, no. 42 and no. 59.]

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32. In case a panel is not persuaded that a significant contribution has been made by a staff member to a co-authored output, is there any opportunity for the staff member concerned to give justification or replace the submitted output by another output?
33. In certain disciplines like the computer science, prestigious conferences are major publication venues. For conference papers in some research areas, correspondence authorship is not clearly marked in the paper. How will it be handled when two authors both claim to be correspondence authors?
34. Will the number of citations be a measure considered by RAE panels, or will it be totally up to individual assessors to decide whether to consider it?
35. According to paragraph 6.7 of the Guidance Notes, research outputs will be captured and assessed in terms of academic strength and quality benchmarking against international standards; research outputs with social relevance should be submitted for evaluation under the element of research impact. If a research output with social relevance is submitted as the underpinning research of an impact case study for the impact element, will it be excluded from being evaluated under the element of research outputs?

(D) Research Impact

36. What is the submission requirement for research impact?
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38. Could a university count the impacts generated by research undertaken by the university but picked up by users elsewhere e.g. a company in the industry in its submission, while the university was not involved in the transition of research method from the laboratory to the company?
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40. Could two submitting universities include the same staff member's work in their impact case studies even though the staff concerned is no longer affiliated with the universities and/or eligible for the RAE 2020?
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46. Could UGC give a clearer definition on how an underpinning research would qualify as equivalent to at least 2 star (2*)?
47. For the underpinning research referenced in each impact case study, would it be possible for universities to know about the number/amount of citations/peer-review funding received that corresponds to 2-star, i.e. international standing?
48. Paragraph 47 of the General Panel Guidelines states that the quality of the underpinning research of an impact case study will not be taken into consideration as part of the assessment for the impact. However, it is required that the quality of the underpinning research needs to meet the 2 star criterion threshold, or else the impact case study will be regarded as not eligible and deemed as unclassified. What is the rationale for this requirement?
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(E) Research Environment

51. What is the submission requirement for research environment?

52. How could central resources and infrastructure provided by universities to different departments/units or inter-disciplinary units be counted against individual UoAs in the university's submission?
53. Please clarify the differentiation of "Academic staff primarily undertaking work at degree or higher level" and "Academic staff not primarily undertaking work at degree or higher level", and how "Partially Funded by General Funds or Wholly Self-funded" is defined in part (A) of Environment Data.
54. Since the majority of research postgraduate (RPg) places are allocated to large scale universities, isn't it unfair to include data on "graduates of RPg programmes" in the assessment of research environment?
55. For the data on "Graduate of RPg Programmes", is there any distinction between graduates of full-time and part-time programmes?
56. If a full-time RPg student is funded by multiple funding sources including UGC and non-UGC funds, should a portion of the headcount be counted under UGC-funded programme while the remaining portion will be counted under non-UGC-funded programmes depending on the percentage of funding contribution?
57. If the Board of Graduate School confirmed the graduation status of a RPg student in October 2017 for the academic year of 2016/17, should the student be counted in the period of "1.9.2016 – 31.8.2017" or "1.9.2017 – 31.8.2018"?
58. Should the amount for "research grants/contract" to be reported in part (C)(i) by source of funding refer to new funds received during the financial year, or the total on-going grants/contract in the year?
59. Is there any linkage between the Common Data Collection Format (CDCF) returns Table 63 with the environment data on research grants/contracts for RAE 2020?
60. Must the concerned staff of research grants/contracts be in the capacity of Principal investigator (PI) / Co-PI? Could research grants/contracts held by staff who are not eligible for the RAE 2020 (e.g. retired staff) be counted?
61. As the environment data covers "research grants/contracts from sources outside Hong Kong which are under the control of the submitting university while funds may not necessarily be transferred to the university for use in Hong Kong", what is the meaning of "control" and what to do if universities are unable to verify the grant amount and relevant information?

62. Would indirect/on-costs of research grants be included in the environment data on “research grants/contracts”? Would funding allocated for the Research Portion of UGC Block Grants be included under “research grants/contracts”?
63. Should universities report contract research and other consultancies under “research grants/contracts” of the Environment Data?
64. Regarding part (C)(i) of Environment Data on “On-going Research Grants/Contracts: by Role of University”, please clarify whether aggregate % should be calculated on the basis of the number of projects (which varies in terms of size and scope) or in terms of grant amount.
65. Should unspent funds of research grants be excluded in the environment data on “research grants/contracts”?
66. For collaborative projects involving several institutions, should the submitting university report the whole grant income or the part of funding received?
67. Would it cause unfairness in assessment if different RAE panels use different weightings for individual aspects of research environment?
68. Would panels consider favorably environments where due consideration is given to gender equality and gender diversity?

(F) Operation and Process

➤ Panels

69. When will the RAE panels be formed and the panel membership be published?
70. What is the composition of RAE panels? What is the basis of selection of the RAE panels?
71. Would there be concern about the engagement of non-local panel members whose general lack of understanding of the local environment might be a drawback in the area of impact assessment which is closely linked to community needs and society fabrics?
72. How would UGC ensure that the “inter-disciplinary champion” in the RAE panels is knowledgeable in both disciplines and other subjects relevant to the submitted work to the panels?

➤ ***Assessment Process***

73. How does the UGC ensure consistency of assessment standards within and across panels?
74. How will panels assure that the process of reviewing research outputs is without prejudice against impact-based publication in non-academic outlets, say editorial, long form journalism or legal reports?
75. As the RAE panels include local members, is there a concern about fairness of the assessment by local members if they are affiliated to competing universities?
76. How will panel members be assigned to conduct the assessment of research outputs?
77. Would ratings given by academic panel members and lay members be equally weighted?
78. If a reviewer makes comments that are not consistent with the regulations stated by UGC, will there be any mechanism within UGC to detect it, discuss the case, ask for amendments, or adjust the scores?
79. In case of a research output requiring two panels to assess, how will the decision be made on the assignment of panel members for assessing the output?
80. In case the same inter-disciplinary output is submitted by different universities to different panels for assessment, will the two panels conduct grade moderation and minimise grade inconsistencies for the same output?

And since the two panels receive the same output as the “primary panels”, which panel is going to make cross-panel referral and assign panel members to assess the output?
81. Will there be more specific criteria that will be applied to determine whether an output should be referred to another panel? Can examples be given to illustrate such guidelines so as to minimise subjective elements?

(G) Results

82. In what form will the results of RAE 2020 be published?

83. Do “results of outputs at research area level” mean results at UoA level? Since a UoA shall comprise a minimum of three eligible staff, could a researcher’s identity be revealed in releasing results at research area level to universities?
84. Will RAE results of individual departments of each university within the same UoA be released to the university? This would eliminate the need of the university to do an internal RAE to assess individual departments for funding purposes.
85. Will assessment results of individual faculty members/researchers be released, so that they may learn from their individual results and seek improvement?

(H) Others

➤ ***Funding Allocation and Related Matter***

86. How will the RAE 2020 results be used by the UGC to determine funding allocation to the eight UGC-funded universities?
87. How much funding will be informed by the RAE 2020 results, and when will this be determined?
88. Will UGC share the costs borne by universities in undertaking the RAE 2020?

➤ ***Release of RAE Information***

89. When will the panel-specific criteria and requirements be made known to universities?

➤ ***Trial Assessment***

90. Will there be any special procedures and instructions in place for subsequent handling of the outputs selected in the sample for trial assessment? There is concern that panelists may form an impression of the sampled outputs before the final criteria are in place.

(A) General

1. Q: Why is the RAE conducted?

A: The RAE is part of the UGC's commitment to assessing the performance of the UGC-funded universities and is intended to encourage world-class research and drive excellence. The outcome of the RAE provides guidance for the universities' future developments in respect of pursuing research excellence. Further, the RAE results are used to inform the allocation of part of the Research Portion of the Block Grant to the UGC-funded universities.

2. Q: Why spending resources to conduct another RAE in 2020?

A: Over the years, the outcome of the RAE has provided guidance for universities' developments in respect of pursuing research excellence. Having regard to the general acceptance and positive feedback from the community, the UGC considered and exchanged views with the Heads of Universities (HoUs) on the future of research assessment in Hong Kong in end 2016. In order to sustain the momentum in promoting world-class research and driving excellence, with the support of universities, the UGC has started the planning of the RAE 2020 since early 2017.

3. Q: What is the dimension of assessment in the RAE 2020?

A: The RAE 2020 will assess research outputs, impact and environment, using international benchmarks to delineate universities' areas of relative strengths and give insights on areas and opportunities for development. It is the first time that the RAE includes research impact as one of the elements of assessment, with a view to encouraging the conduct of research of broader social relevance with high economic and social benefits.

The respective weighting of the three elements of assessment are as follows –

- (a) Research outputs – 70%
- (b) Impact – 15%
- (c) Environment – 15%

4. Q: **How is the RAE 2020 different from the previous RAE 2014?**

A: The RAE 2020 will include new elements of assessment on research impact and environment*, in addition to research outputs, with a view to incentivising the conduct of broader social relevance with high economic and social benefits and taking into account universities' strategy, resources and infrastructure that support research.

* For the purpose of the RAE 2020 –

Research impact is defined as the demonstrable contributions, beneficial effects, valuable changes or advantages that research qualitatively brings to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life; and that are beyond the academia.

Research environment refers to the strategy, resources (e.g. grants obtained, people) and infrastructure that support research giving rise to collaborations, esteem and contributions to the discipline or research base.

5. Q: **What is the assessment period and census date for the RAE 2020?**

A: The census date for reported data is 30 September 2019, and the assessment period is six years from 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2019.

6. Q: **When is the due date for universities to make submissions for the RAE 2020?**

A: Universities are requested to submit the following materials and data in accordance with the dates shown below –

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 31 July 2019 | - Request(s), if any, for special consideration/exemption for individual staff members |
| 2 December 2019 | - A list of all eligible academic staff for each unit of assessment |
| | - A list of full-time academic staff wholly funded by the university proper for degree or higher degree work within Staff Grades of “A” to “I” (as at the census date of 30 |

September 2019) who are not reported in the list of eligible academic staff

- 16 December 2019 - Research Strategy Statement of the university
- Full version of research outputs and information required on research outputs
 - Information required on research impact including impact overview statement and impact case study(ies)
 - Information required on research environment including environment overview statement and related data

(B) Eligibility of Academic Staff

7. Q: What are the staff eligibility criteria for making submissions of research outputs for the RAE 2020?

A: According to Section IV. of the Guidance Notes, a staff member must meet all the following criteria in order to be eligible for submitting research outputs for the RAE 2020 –

- (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 proper¹ for degree or higher degree work and are within staff grades of “Professor” to “Assistant Lecturer” as defined for the purpose of the Common Data Collection Format (CDCF).

¹ Excluding schools/arms of the continuing education and professional training and other analogous organisations.

8. Q: **Will all eligible academic staff of a university or just those who make submissions be counted in the RAE 2020?**

A: All academic staff of a university who meet the eligibility criteria as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the Guidance Notes, regardless they make submissions or not, will be taken into account in the university's results in the RAE 2020. As in previous RAEs, the RAE 2020 will be assessing the quality of research of the universities holistically on a UoA basis rather than evaluating each individual submitting staff member.

9. Q: **Could faculty who have served a substantial period of time during the assessment period but whose appointment does not cover the census date be considered in the RAE 2020?**

A: The census date is an essential parameter in defining staff eligibility for the RAE 2020. Faculty members whose appointments do not cover the census date would not meet the staff eligibility criteria. According to paragraphs 7.6, 9.5 and 9.8 of the Guidance Notes, non-eligible staff employed during the assessment period may be included in the impact submissions and be taken into account in the environment data of the respective universities' environment submissions. In this regard, faculty members who do not hold appointments covering the census date are considered in the RAE 2020.

10. Q: **If the terms of appointment of an academic meet the staff eligibility criteria for the RAE 2020, but he/she has taken prolonged paid or unpaid leave during the appointment, would his/her eligibility be affected?**

A: An eligible academic staff for the RAE 2020 should (a) hold a full-time paid appointment; (b) for a continuous period of at least 36 months covering the census date, i.e. 30 September 2019; (c) within staff grades "A" to "I" wholly funded by the university proper; and (d) the employment start date of whom was no later than 1 September 2017. If the academic in question takes paid or unpaid leave without actually starting the employment before 1 September 2017, or if his/her full-time paid appointment within staff grades "A" to "I" at a university does not make up a continuous period of at least 36 months due to the taking of unpaid leaves, the academic in question should not be regarded as eligible for the RAE 2020 even though his/her initial employment terms meet the requirements in the staff eligibility criteria.

11. Q: If an academic staff member has taken or is taking unpaid leave during the assessment period, is he/she eligible for submitting research outputs for the RAE 2020?

A: According paragraph 4.5 of the Guidance Notes, an academic staff member who meets all the eligibility criteria as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the Guidance Notes should be counted as an eligible academic staff regardless of any paid or unpaid leave he/she has taken during the assessment period. If the staff member concerned holds a full-time paid appointment of at least 36 months covering the census date and started the employment no later than 1 September 2017, and subject to meeting the other requirements as set out in the Guidance Notes, he/she would be regarded as an eligible staff member irrespective of any paid or unpaid leave taken during the assessment period.

12. Q: If an academic staff held a continuous full-time paid appointment of more than 36 months within staff grades “A” to “I” by 31 August 2017, but changed appointment to fractional basis from 1 September 2017 to 31 August 2018 and is expected to resume the former full-time paid appointment within staff grades “A” to “I” after 31 August 2018, would this academic be eligible for the RAE 2020?

A: As the staff member in question was not in continuous full time employment for at least 36 months from 1 September 2017, he/she does not meet the staff eligibility criteria as stipulated in paragraph 4.1 of the Guidance Notes and is not an eligible staff for submitting research outputs for the RAE 2020.

13. Q: How universities are to handle eligible academic staff who are on joint appointment by more than one unit/department of an university?

A: Provided that the staff concerned meet all the eligibility criteria as set out in the Guidance Notes, universities are required to assign each of the eligible full-time paid academic staff, including those on joint appointment by two or more units/departments in the same university, to a research area and hence the corresponding unit of assessment (UoA) by head count. Each eligible staff member reported will be counted as a whole unit “1” against the UoA to which he/she is assigned.

14. Q: **Universities' assignment of eligible academic staff to a research area and respective units of assessment can be subject to re-assignment by the UGC in case of an anomaly. Would universities be allowed to give representation and appeal against the re-assignment?**

A: According to paragraph 4.4 of the Guidance Notes, the re-assignment will be based on the recommendations of relevant RAE panel(s) and clarifications made by universities concerned, if any. In other words, clarifications from the university concerned may be sought through the UGC Secretariat, where appropriate. The re-assignment made will be final in forming the RAE results and no appeal on this will be considered.

15. Q: **Will eligible academic staff who are in practice-oriented disciplines or have been on leave for a prolonged period during the assessment period be exempted for inclusion in the RAE 2020?**

A: All academic staff who meet the eligibility criteria in Section IV. of the Guidance Notes should be taken into account in the RAE 2020. There is no exemption arrangement for particular groups of staff under the RAE 2020.

There is a new arrangement in the RAE 2020 that in exceptional cases, special consideration/exemption may be granted by the UGC to eligible academic staff who have been absent for a prolonged period, including those on leave for health, parental or other compassionate reasons, on a case by case basis.

16. Q: **Why is there not a clear and straightforward policy in the granting of special consideration/exemption for eligible staff on maternity? It would be reasonable to allow automatic reduction of one output for anyone who has at least one birth during the assessment period.**

A: Similar view and suggestion were noted and considered by the UGC and its sub-committees at their meetings in May 2018. Regarding the proposed automatic reduction of one output for staff on maternity grounds, there is a practical need for universities to provide information and documentary proof in order to identify and process for such cases. While individual staff cases may involve maternity and/or other concurrent circumstances or complications, providing automatic reduction on maternity ground may open up questions on gender equality and similar arguments on other grounds. On balance, the UGC and its sub-committees affirmed to maintain the provisions in Guidance

Notes, i.e. universities may request for special consideration/exemption for individual staff members on a case by case basis.

17. Q: How would you respond to the opinion that the RAE has driven academics to concentrate on research and less on teaching?

A: Research, teaching and learning are amongst the core missions of UGC-funded universities. The RAE results will provide guidance for the universities' future developments in respect of pursuing research excellence and creating yet more synergies among research, teaching and learning activities.

18. Q: How do you respond to the observation of “game-playing” by universities, e.g. hiring “star professors” from overseas to boost the RAE performance. What has been/will be done by the UGC to deter/penalise such “game-playing” action?

A: There has been no evidence to substantiate the observations of “game-playing” by universities in the RAEs.

That said, the UGC has put in place measures with a view to addressing any (potential) occurrence of recruiting staff solely for the purpose of making submissions for the RAE 2020. In finalising the Framework for the RAE 2020, the UGC decided to refine the commencement date of employment in the staff eligibility criteria from “1 October 2018” (in the proposed framework for consultation issued in May 2017) to “1 September 2017” (in the finalised Framework announced in October 2017). Agreement had been reached with the Heads of Universities on the refinement before announcement of the finalised Framework.

19. Q: There has been concern on allowing portability of research outputs for the RAE 2020. What’s the UGC’s view?

A: The UGC discussed and revisited the issue relating to portability of outputs in May and September 2017. Having considered the development and complexity in transitioning to non-portability of research outputs in the UK, the grounds for portability and non-portability of research outputs, operational practicality and burden on universities while balancing the sustainability of universities' research capacity and the significant changes made between the RAE 2020 and previous exercise (i.e. the introduction of impact and environment as new elements of assessment), the UGC agreed to maintain the decision on portability of outputs as a sensible arrangement for the RAE 2020.

(C) Research Outputs

20. Q: How many research outputs for each eligible staff should be submitted by the university? Are there any exemptions for eligible staff to submit fewer items?

A: The university will submit a maximum of four research outputs for each eligible staff. A university is free to decide, in consultation with the staff concerned, not to make a submission or submit fewer than four outputs, and no adverse record should or will be attached to any individual in respect of whom such a decision is taken. Any missing outputs will be deemed as “unclassified” in RAE 2020.

Nevertheless, special consideration/exemption may be granted by the UGC under paragraphs 4.5-4.6 of the Guidance Notes for eligible staff to submit fewer than four outputs. Apart from that, paragraph 5.6 of the Guidance Notes also sets out the number of outputs (less than four) to be submitted in respect of “New Researchers”. If staff with exemption granted or new researchers submit fewer than the specified number of output(s), the missing item(s) will also be deemed as “unclassified”.

21. Q: Why does definition of research outputs in the RAE 2020 not include those completed yet unpublished working papers?

A: It is an essential criterion in the RAE that research outputs must be publicly accessible or effectively shared in the profession. As in previous RAEs, the RAE 2020 accepts research output that “is not yet published but officially accepted for publication” provided that it meets the criteria for the definition of research outputs in paragraph 5.7 of the Guidance Notes, viz.

- (a) the output contains an element of new insights or innovation;
- (b) the output and its process contribute to scholarship or transfer of knowledge, generating impact to academia or society at large; and
- (c) the output is publicly accessible or effectively shared in the profession.

The RAE 2020 also recognises that there may be non-traditional outputs that are “not in published form” but “effectively shared in the profession” in the assessment period which spans six years. Completed unpublished working papers, if demonstrated to have been effectively

shared in the profession during the assessment period, such as in form of conference papers, could be considered to be meeting the above criteria.

22. Q: Would confidential reports (to which the sponsors (or government) have indicated sensitive issues) be included as research outputs for the RAE 2020?

A: The definition of research output for the RAE 2020 requires that the output must be publicly accessible or effectively shared in the profession. Paragraph 5.10 of the Guidance Notes provides that proprietary research that does not result in output that is accessible to the public and the profession is not accepted as an output for assessment. In this regard, confidential reports involving sensitive information entrusted in confidence or in secret are not covered. If such confidential reports become public (i.e. unclassified from being confidential), they may be submitted so long as they meet the definition and criteria for research outputs.

23. Q: Can research outputs which are not yet published by the census date be accepted for submission for the RAE 2020?

A: Provided that a research output meets all of criteria at paragraph 5.7 of Guidance Notes, it can be considered to fall within acceptable research outputs if it is not yet published, but officially accepted for publication (without any prior condition for its publication) within the assessment period, i.e. 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2019 and supported by a letter of acceptance.

24. Q: If a research output is an online-only or online-first publication and is yet to be formally published in print, is it regarded as a published output?

A: If an research output was published online and fulfills the criteria as set out at paragraph 5.7 of the Guidance Notes, the output is regarded as published even it was firstly published online.

25. Q: If an output was first published online and later in print, which publication date should be counted?

A: According paragraph 5.3 of the Guidance Notes, in case of an individual output bearing multiple publication dates, the date on which it is firstly published or made publicly available, be it online or printed, should be counted. If an output was published or made publicly available online

prior to printed publication, the online publication date should be counted. In making submissions for such outputs, universities should ensure the online publication dates were within the assessment period from 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2019.

26. Q: Would a paper (not yet published but unconditionally accepted) submitted in RAE 2014 and subsequently published within the assessment period of RAE 2020 be accepted for submission for the RAE 2020?

A: If an output was submitted to RAE 2014 then it cannot be submitted again to RAE 2020. This remains the case even if the 2014 submission was of an output not yet published, though unconditionally accepted, and eventually published within the RAE 2020 assessment period. It is the same work, and cannot be used twice in this way.

Supplementary information

If an output was firstly published or firstly made publicly available (even if it was not yet officially published) in its full form on or before 30 September 2013, the output would fall outside the RAE 2020 assessment period and would not be eligible for submission to RAE 2020.

27. Q: If a research output was published before or during the assessment periods, could a revised or translated version of the output as second edition or second language publication be submitted for the RAE 2020?

A: If an eligible staff member already published his/her research output before the assessment periods for the RAE 2020, i.e. before 1 October 2013, a revised edition or translated version of this output, as a derivative work of the staff member's previously published output, would not be regarded as an output produced during the assessment periods unless it meets the criteria at paragraph 5.7 of the Guidance Notes for the RAE 2020, viz.

- (a) the output contains an element of new insights or innovation;
- (b) the output and its process contribute to scholarship or transfer of knowledge, generating impact to academia or society at large; and
- (c) the output is publicly accessible or effectively shared in the profession.

28. Q: Would outputs that do not carry the submitting university's name be considered as eligible submission?

A: According to paragraph 5.8 of the Guidance Notes, provided that all the criteria for the definition of research output are fully met, it does not matter whether or not the output items were produced in or outside Hong Kong and/or whether the eligible staff concerned were employed by the submitting universities at the time of publication or production of the outputs. In other words, it has not been a requirement that each output submitted for the RAE must carry the submitting university's name.

29. Q: Will a brief summary highlighting the features of a research output be allowed in the RAE 2020?

A: According to the Guidance Notes, abstract of research outputs in English will be required as a means to provide summary information about the research outputs, whereas submission of supplementary information (up to 300 words) will apply to non-traditional research outputs.

In view of the burden on university staff in preparing the additional information as well as the variations in the quality of writing in the additional information that may distract/dilute the assessment of the outputs themselves, there is no general provision on the submission of a brief summary for each output. Panels will decide whether any additional information in respect of research outputs will be required in their Panel-specific Guidelines.

30. Q: Will the evaluation of a research output be based on the quality of the output alone, or will the contributions of the person who submits the output in the corresponding work be also considered? In the latter case, will there be any way for the person submitting the research output to describe his/her contributions?

A: According to paragraphs 6.1 and 6.4 of the Guidance Notes, research outputs will be assessed in terms of their originality, significance and rigour with reference to international standards. The quality of each output will be judged on its own merits. The contribution of submitting authors is a consideration in the assessment of co-authored outputs. As stated in paragraph 34 of the General Panel Guidelines, panels will consider co-authorship to be a normal element of research activity in the field and expect all named co-authors to have made a significant contribution to the research process leading to the output concerned. RAE panels will provide further guidance on co-authored research

outputs in their Panel-specific Guidelines. They will state in the Panel-specific Guidelines if any information is required to support the inclusion of co-authored outputs applicable to the panels.

31. Q: **Under what circumstances will a panel not be satisfied that a staff member has made significant contribution to the production of a co-authored output and grade the output as “unclassified”?**

A: It should be noted that panels will consider co-authorship to be a normal element of research activity in the field and expect all named co-authors to have made a significant contribution to the research process leading to the output concerned. Panels will provide guidance on co-authored research outputs in the Panel-specific Guidelines, and elaborate on any requirement to support the inclusion of co-authored outputs for their consideration.

32. Q: **In case a panel is not persuaded that a significant contribution has been made by a staff member to a co-authored output, is there any opportunity for the staff member concerned to give justification or replace the submitted output by another output?**

A: According to paragraph 34 of the General Panel Guidelines, if a panel is not persuaded that a submitting staff member has made a significant contribution to a co-authored output, the panel may seek further verification for the inclusion of the output. There is no provision for replacement of submitted outputs, whether they are single-authored or co-authored.

33. Q: **In certain disciplines like the computer science, prestigious conferences are major publication venues. For conference papers in some research areas, correspondence authorship is not clearly marked in the paper. How will it be handled when two authors both claim to be correspondence authors?**

A: As suggested in the General Panel Guidelines, panels will consider co-authorship to be a normal element of research activity in the field and expect all named co-authors to have made a significant contribution to the research process leading to the output concerned. Panels will specify their position on co-authored research outputs, and may require information (e.g. role and contribution of individual staff member of the submitting university to a co-authored output) to support the inclusion of co-authored outputs.

Correspondence author is only one of the examples given to RAE panels concerning co-authored/co-produced outputs in the template for developing the panel-specific guidelines. Panels may decide not to take into account the order or role of authorship in considering the submitting staff's significant contribution to co-authored outputs.

34. Q: Will the number of citations be a measure considered by RAE panels, or will it be totally up to individual assessors to decide whether to consider it?

A: According to paragraphs 5.17 (e) of the Guidance Notes, whether metrics/citation data are to be used to inform the peer review process will be decided by each of the RAE panels. If a panel wishes to use metrics to inform its decision, it will advise universities in their Panel-specific Guidelines. Otherwise, no metric/citation data should be included in the submission.

35. Q: According to paragraph 6.7 of the Guidance Notes, research outputs will be captured and assessed in terms of academic strength and quality benchmarking against international standards; research outputs with social relevance should be submitted for evaluation under the element of research impact. If a research output with social relevance is submitted as the underpinning research of an impact case study for the impact element, will it be excluded from being evaluated under the element of research outputs?

A: In principle, the same research output can be submitted for assessment under the research outputs element, and separately as a research output referenced in an impact case study under the impact element. Under the research outputs element, the quality of this output will be assessed for its academic strength and quality in terms of originality, significance and rigour. Under the impact element, the quality of this output will be evaluated to assure that the threshold of 2 star has been met. Once the 2 star quality threshold of underpinning research is established, the assessment of the quality of the impact claimed should be independent and separate from the quality of the underpinning research.

(D) Research Impact

36. Q: What is the submission requirement for research impact?

A: Universities with three or more eligible academic staff in a UoA are expected to make an impact submission for that unit. Each unit of impact submission should include:

- (a) one impact overview statement describing the submitting unit's approach during the assessment period from 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2019, to enabling impact from its research; and
- (b) impact case study(ies) describing specific examples of impacts achieved during the assessment period by the submitting university, underpinned by research, research activity or a body of work derived from research (as equivalent to at least 2-star (2*) quality), undertaken at, or significantly supported by, the submitting university in the period from 1 January 2000 to 30 September 2019, with prescribed quantity and page limit as stipulated below –

Number of eligible academic staff (headcount) in the UoA	Page limit (A4 size) for each impact overview statement	Number of case study(ies) required for submission to the UoA	Page limit (A4 size) for each impact case study
3 – 15	2	1	4
16 – 30	2	2	4
31 – 45	2	3	4
46 or more	3	4, plus 1 further case study per additional 40 staff (headcount)	4

In case of nil submission or submission below the requirement, the missing submission or the missing part of it will be deemed as “unclassified” and the respective panel will take this into account in the overall rating of the unit concerned.

37. Q: Is it a must for research impacts be generated from the research outputs submitted for the RAE?

A: No. Research impacts for the RAE 2020 must be achieved during the assessment period, i.e. 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2019, by the submitting university, underpinned by research, research activity or a

body of work derived from research (with quality as equivalent to at least attaining 2 star (2*), i.e. of international standing), undertaken at, or significantly supported by, the submitting university within the period from 1 January 2000 to 30 September 2019.

38. Q: Could a university count the impacts generated by research undertaken by the university but picked up by users elsewhere e.g. a company in the industry in its submission, while the university was not involved in the transition of research method from the laboratory to the company?

A: For the purpose of RAE 2020, impact must be enabled, generated or substantially supported by the submitting university during the assessment period, 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2019, underpinned by research undertaken at, or significantly supported by, the submitting university during 1 January 2000 to 30 September 2019. The submitting unit/university is to present how it made a distinct and material contribution to the impact in the assessment period such that the impact would not have occurred or would have been significantly reduced without the contribution of research.

39. Q: Do all researchers (and the underpinning research) have to come from the same submitting unit of assessment (UoA)?

A: The period of underpinning research spans about 20 years. Academic departments or research units within a university may undergo internal restructuring or renaming. The Guidance Notes state that the impact case study(ies) should be the strongest example(s) selected to present the impacts that are generated or substantially supported by the submitting unit, and the impacts must be underpinned by research undertaken at, or significantly supported by, the submitting university.

40. Q: Could two submitting universities include the same staff member's work in their impact case studies even though the staff concerned is no longer affiliated with the universities and/or eligible for the RAE 2020?

A: As set out in paragraph 7.6 of the Guidance Notes, impacts underpinned by research of non-eligible academic staff (e.g. part-time researchers and staff appointed after 1 September 2017) may be selected by universities in the submission. It does not matter if the researchers concerned are not eligible academic staff of the submitting university or no longer employed by the university. In principle, two universities

may include an academic's work in their impact case studies. That said, each of the submitting universities needs to illustrate that the impacts are generated or substantially supported by the submitting unit, and underpinned by research undertaken at, or significantly supported by, the submitting university.

41. Q: For impact case studies which involve inter-institutional collaborations, how will the impact cases be recognised and how to count the contribution?

A: With reference to paragraphs 7.6 and 7.9 of the Guidance Notes, impact case study(ies) submitted by each unit of a university should be the strongest example(s) selected to present the impacts that are generated or substantially supported by the unit. Where an impact involves collaborations of multiple submitting units/universities within the same or across different UoAs, each of the submitting units/universities may submit a case study of the impact so long as it has made a distinct and material contribution to the impact taking/taken place.

42. Q: Should multiple submission of one impact case study from different UoAs within the same university be accepted?

A: In principle, impact case studies submitted by different units of the same university should not be identical, as each unit should show how it has made a distinct and material contribution to the impact claimed. While different impact case studies may be underpinned by research of the same researchers (who might change universities during the period of underpinning research) and/or jointly supported by multiple units, each submitting unit should present its distinct and material contribution in the impact case study on how it generated or supported the impact in the assessment period. This principle applies to the submission of impact case studies supported by different units of the same university or different universities.

43. Q: Is there any limit on the number of research projects or number of researchers involved in one impact case study?

A: For the assessment of the impact element, the focus is the impact achieved by the submitting unit, not the impact of individuals or individual research outputs, although they may contribute to the evidence of the submitting unit's impact. As set out in paragraph 7.10 and Appendix H of the Guidance Notes, each impact case study should contain descriptions of the underpinning research including information

on “the key researchers concerned” and “references to key outputs” with an indicative maximum of six references. There is no further specification on the limit or number of research projects or researchers involved in the case study.

44. Q: If the impact case involved policy changes or professional practice, is it required that the number of people affected by the policy changes have to be estimated?

A: It would help to demonstrate the reach, and perhaps also the significance, of the impact if a reasonably evidenced figure of the number of people affected could be provided.

45. Q: Could some sample case studies be provided to universities for reference?

A: It has been included in the Guidance Notes for the RAE 2020 that examples of impact submissions and case studies in other jurisdictions may be accessed online such as <http://results.ref.ac.uk/Results/SelectUoa> from the United Kingdom.

46. Q: Could UGC give a clearer definition on how an underpinning research would qualify as equivalent to at least 2 star (2*)?

A: It has been stated in the Framework and the Guidance Notes that the quality level of 2 star for underpinning research is equivalent to attaining “international standing”. In developing their Panel-specific Guidelines, panels will provide guidance on their approach to evaluating and establishing the underpinning research referenced in each impact case study is of at least 2-star standard.

47. Q: For the underpinning research referenced in each impact case study, would it be possible for universities to know about the number/amount of citations/peer-review funding received that corresponds to 2-star, i.e. international standing?

A: As stated in the Guidance Notes and General Panel Guidelines, information on citation data/metrics should not be used in any algorithmic or deterministic way for the evaluation of research quality. Panels should be aware of the limitations of citation data, in particular their variability within as well as between disciplines. In this light, there is no intention to suggest all panels to adopt a certain number or amount of citations/peer-reviewed funding in their evaluation of

underpinning research. The “number of citations/peer-reviewed funding received” is only an example in the template for illustration to panels in developing their panel-specific guidelines.

48. Q: Paragraph 47 of the General Panel Guidelines states that the quality of the underpinning research of an impact case study will not be taken into consideration as part of the assessment for the impact. However, it is required that the quality of the underpinning research needs to meet the 2 star criterion threshold, or else the impact case study will be regarded as not eligible and deemed as unclassified. What is the rationale for this requirement?

A: The quality of the underpinning research as equivalent to at least 2 star is a threshold condition for the assessment of the corresponding impact case study. This is separate from the assessment of the quality of the impact claimed. In case the quality of the underpinning research is not up to the required standard, the case study will be regarded as not eligible for the RAE 2020 and deemed as “unclassified”. The “unclassified” rating in this case does not reflect the quality of impact case study, but its ineligibility according to the RAE 2020 submission requirements.

49. Q: Would separate grading and/or weighting be applied to impact overview statement and impact case study(ies) in the assessment of research impact?

A: With reference to paragraph 8.3 of the Guidance Notes, RAE panels will take the impact overview statement and case study(ies) as a whole, and give a collective rating based on the merits of each impact submission. At its meeting in May 2018, the UGC affirmed the provision of assessing research impact submissions as a whole and not to prescribe separate weightings to impact overview statement and impact case study(ies) across all RAE panels.

50. Q: Is there any support from UGC to facilitate universities in getting evidence of impact from relevant government departments?

A: The Chairman, UGC may issue letters to relevant government departments (e.g. Transport Department and Environmental Protection Department) to appeal for their support to provide relevant data/information as evidence of impact upon universities’ request.

(E) Research Environment

51. Q: What is the submission requirement for research environment?

A: Universities with three or more eligible academic staff in a unit of assessment are expected to make a submission in respect of the environment element for that unit. Each unit of environment submission should include:

- (a) an environment overview statement describing the submitting unit's research strategy; its support for research staff and students; its research income, infrastructure and facilities; its research collaborations, esteem and wider contributions to the discipline or research base during the assessment period from 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2019 with the prescribed page limit as stipulated below –

Number of eligible academic staff (headcount) in the UoA	Page limit (A4 size) for each environment overview statement
3 – 15	4
16 – 30	6
31 – 45	8
46 or more	10

- (b) data on staff, graduates of research postgraduate (RPg) programmes and research grants/contracts from different sources of funding etc. during the assessment period from 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2019.

In case of nil submission or submission below the requirement, the missing submission or the missing part of it will be deemed as “unclassified” and the respective panel will take this into account in the overall rating of the unit concerned.

52. Q: How could central resources and infrastructure provided by universities to different departments/units or inter-disciplinary units be counted against individual UoAs in the university's submission?

A: Universities' central resources and infrastructure could be presented in individual UoAs' environment overview statements in terms of the share or level of support accorded to the UoAs.

53. Q: **Please clarify the differentiation of “Academic staff primarily undertaking work at degree or higher level” and “Academic staff not primarily undertaking work at degree or higher level”, and how “Partially Funded by General Funds or Wholly Self-funded” is defined in part (A) of Environment Data.**

A: The data required for the four groups of staff in part (A) of the “Environment Data” correspond to the definition and categorisation in the CDCF (i.e. Definition C2 on “Staff Grades” and Definition C4 on “Source of Staff Salary Funding” in the prevailing CDCF Guidance Notes). The section on “Wholly Funded by General Funds” in part (A) refers to staff wholly UGC-funded from General Funds (i.e. “A” under Definition C4 mentioned above), whereas the section on “Partially Funded by General Funds or Wholly Financed” refers to other staff not wholly UGC-funded from General Funds.

54. Q: **Since the majority of research postgraduate (RPg) places are allocated to large scale universities, isn’t it unfair to include data on “graduates of RPg programmes” in the assessment of research environment?**

A: The requirement of environment data on “graduates of RPg programmes” had undergone consultation with the universities and was subsequently announced in the Framework and Guidance Notes for the RAE 2020 in October 2017 and July 2018 respectively. As there has been general acceptance on the Framework, the requirements on the environment data should be maintained. That said, the UGC will use information about the scale of universities and units of assessment when considering the significance of the results of the RAE.

55. Q: **For the data on “Graduate of RPg Programmes”, is there any distinction between graduates of full-time and part-time programmes?**

A: The number of graduates of RPg programmes for part (B) of the “Environment Data” covers graduates of both full-time and part-time RPg programmes in terms of headcount.

56. Q: **If a full-time RPg student is funded by multiple funding sources including UGC and non-UGC funds, should a portion of the headcount be counted under UGC-funded programme while the remaining portion will be counted under non-UGC-funded programmes depending on the percentage of funding contribution?**

A: For the part on graduates of UGC-funded RPg Programmes for the RAE 2020 “Environment Data”, it corresponds to Table 28.2 “Graduates of UGC-funded RPg Programmes” in the Common Data Collection Format returns (CDCF) for which its prevailing Guidance Notes state that RPg students funded by UGC and RPg students supported by external funding should be reported in this table. As for the RPg student in question, “1” should be reported under Table 28.2 for CDCF, and the RAE 2020 “Environment Data” for the relevant year should correspond to the CDCF return concerned.

57. Q: **If the Board of Graduate School confirmed the graduation status of a RPg student in October 2017 for the academic year of 2016/17, should the student be counted in the period of “1.9.2016 – 31.8.2017” or “1.9.2017 – 31.8.2018”?**

A: As the part on graduates of UGC-funded RPg Programmes for the RAE 2020 “Environment Data” corresponds to Table 28.2 “Graduates of UGC-funded RPg Programmes” in the Common Data Collection Format (CDCF) returns, the prevailing CDCF Guidance Notes state under D16 that “[f]or RPg graduates, the research degree is considered to be awarded once it has been approved by the institution...”. The RPg in question should be reported under the period of “1.9.2017 – 31.8.2018”.

58. Q: **Should the amount for “research grants/contract” to be reported in part (C)(i) by source of funding refer to new funds received during the financial year, or the total on-going grants/contract in the year?**

A: The research grants/contracts for part (C) of the “Environment Data” refers to funding covered under “Head 4 Research grants/contracts” of “E8 Income” in the prevailing CDCF Guidance Notes. The funding amount in HK\$ million for each of the years from 2013/14 to 2018/19 in part (C) of the “Environment Data” should be –

(a) actually received by the submitting university; or

(b) grants outside Hong Kong under the control of the submitting

university, i.e. university concerned has the authority to approve the use of funds for the research grants/contracts, while funds may not necessarily be transferred to the university for use in Hong Kong.

59. Q: Is there any linkage between the Common Data Collection Format (CDCF) returns Table 63 with the environment data on research grants/contracts for RAE 2020?

A: Table 63 for the CDCF returns collects data on “project value” instead of “income” as required for the “Environment Data” for the RAE 2020. The “Environment Data” on research grants/contracts and the return for CDCF Table 63 do not have particular linkage except that both share the definitions of “source of funding”, “research grants / research contracts” as referenced in CDCF Table 63.

60. Q: Must the concerned staff of research grants/contracts be in the capacity of Principal investigator (PI) / Co-PI? Could research grants/contracts held by staff who are not eligible for the RAE 2020 (e.g. retired staff) be counted?

A: The funding amount to be reported should be actually received by the submitting university regardless of the capacity/role of the personnel involved in the research grants/projects. The funding to be reported do not confine to eligible staff for the RAE 2020. Further, grants outside Hong Kong under the control of the submitting university, i.e. university concerned has the authority to approve the use of funds for the research grants/contracts, while funds may not necessarily be transferred to the university for use in Hong Kong could also be reported under part (C) of the Environment Data.

61. Q: As the environment data covers “research grants/contracts from sources outside Hong Kong which are under the control of the submitting university while funds may not necessarily be transferred to the university for use in Hong Kong”, what is the meaning of “control” and what to do if universities are unable to verify the grant amount and relevant information?

A: As in the RAE 2014, universities are advised to arrange with the submitting units/staff concerned on the research grants/contracts from sources outside Hong Kong which are under their control, and have access to relevant documentations to support their submission of relevant grants/contract data as appropriate.

Regarding the meaning of “control”, it is set out in footnote 4 of the “Environment Data” template at Appendix J of the Guidance Notes that “the university concerned has the authority to approve the use of funds for the research grants/contracts”.

62. Q: Would indirect/on-costs of research grants be included in the environment data on “research grants/contracts”? Would funding allocated for the Research Portion of UGC Block Grants be included under “research grants/contracts”?

A: Indirect/on-costs attached to research grants/contracts will be included under part (C)(i) of the Environment Data on research grants/contracts. As for the research funding under UGC Block Grant, it will be included under item (4) of the “Environment Overview Statement”.

63. Q: Should universities report contract research and other consultancies under “research grants/contracts” of the Environment Data?

A: The research grants/contracts for part (C) of the “Environment Data” refer to funding covered under “Head 4 Research grants/contracts” of “E8 Income” in the prevailing Common Data Collection Format (CDCF) Guidance Notes, while the definition “F6 Contract Research” therein is relevant. As for other consultancies reported under Table 73 for the CDCF returns, it excludes the research grants/contracts already reported in Table 63 for the CDCF returns which corresponds to research grants/contracts as referenced under Head 4 of E8. Thus consultancies that do not correspond to Head 4 of E8 of CDCF returns are not relevant for the Environment Data for the RAE 2020.

64. Q: Regarding part (C)(i) of Environment Data on “On-going Research Grants/Contracts: by Role of University”, please clarify whether aggregate % should be calculated on the basis of the number of projects (which varies in terms of size and scope) or in terms of grant amount.

A: Calculation of “aggregate %” in part (C)(ii) of “Environment Data” corresponds to the funding amount in part (C)(i), i.e. the total amount for “Ongoing Research Grants/Contracts” in each of the years from 2013/14 to 2018/19. The total of “aggregate %” in part (C)(ii) for each year should be 100%.

65. Q: **Should unspent funds of research grants be excluded in the environment data on “research grants/contracts”?**

A: Yes. Unspent funds of research grants should be excluded.

66. Q: **For collaborative projects involving several institutions, should the submitting university report the whole grant income or the part of funding received?**

A: The submitting university should report funding received and exclude the amount transferred to other institutions.

67. Q: **Would it cause unfairness in assessment if different RAE panels use different weightings for individual aspects of research environment?**

A: As the RAE 2020 covers 41 UoAs under 13 subject panels, there could be another side of argument that applying the same weighting to different RAE panels might cause unfairness. In RAE 2014, panels were allowed to decide on the weightings for the grants and esteem elements. Therefore, the provision for panels to decide whether to attach weighting to individual aspects of research environment is maintained following the announcement of the Framework for the RAE 2020.

68. Q: **Would panels consider favorably environments where due consideration is given to gender equality and gender diversity?**

A: As suggested in paragraph 65 of the General Panel Guidelines, views on appropriate sizes and organisational structures of research environments will be for specific panels to consider. As a general principle, though, evidence of attention to achieving a suitable level of diversity in the make-up of a research environment will be regarded positively.

(F) Operation and Process

➤ Panels

69. Q: **When will the RAE panels be formed and the panel membership be published?**

A: Convenors and Deputy Convenors of the thirteen panels have been appointed and the list is available on the UGC website.

As for panel members, the panel formation is underway. As in previous exercises, the RAE panel membership will be released for public information after universities have made their submissions.

70. Q: What is the composition of RAE panels? What is the basis of selection of the RAE panels?

A: The RAE panels will consist of mainly international non-local academics (about 70%) and some local academics in the relevant disciplines, and also local “research end-users” and professionally qualified people from business, government, industry and the arts.

The UGC considers that panel membership is crucial to the RAE process and the selection of panel members is made with primary consideration on the candidates’ academic standing, research strength and reputation.

71. Q: Would there be concern about the engagement of non-local panel members whose general lack of understanding of the local environment might be a drawback in the area of impact assessment which is closely linked to community needs and society fabrics?

A: The RAE 2020 comprises three elements of assessment namely outputs (70%), impact (15%) and environment (15%). The engagement of non-local members being the majority of RAE panel membership is intended to ensure independent and fair assessment according to international standards. Local “research end-users” and professionals in respective fields (who will not be academics) will be engaged as lay members to take part in the assessment of impact. Impact assessors mainly from the local context will also be engaged as necessary to supplement the panels’ expertise in assessing the impact submissions. As about 30% of the RAE panel membership will come from Hong Kong, it is considered that local panel members could sufficiently provide inputs on local context and conditions during the assessment. Besides, it is worth noting the impacts for assessment in the RAE 2020 may occur in any geographical location whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.

72. Q: How would UGC ensure that the “inter-disciplinary champion” in the RAE panels is knowledgeable in both disciplines and other subjects relevant to the submitted work to the panels?

A: The role of the “inter-disciplinary champion” is to provide specific input

and support in overseeing the assignment and assessment of inter-disciplinary submissions and in liaising with relevant panel members to ensure that submissions will receive adequate attention and be evaluated by members with suitable expertise. The “inter-disciplinary champion” is not expected to be expert in the subject matter of these submissions. Rather, the role is to seek to ensure fair and appropriate assessment, so that inter-disciplinary submissions can be seen to have been assessed on an equal footing with single discipline submissions.

➤ *Assessment Process*

73. Q: How does the UGC ensure consistency of assessment standards within and across panels?

A: Common quality standards will be adopted across this criterion-referenced assessment exercise. To ensure consistent adherence to the published guidelines and assessment criteria within and across panels, a trial assessment involving all RAE panels will be conducted around January/February 2020 after the submission phase.

74. Q: How will panels assure that the process of reviewing research outputs is without prejudice against impact-based publication in non-academic outlets, say editorial, long form journalism or legal reports?

A: According to the Guidance Notes and General Panel Guidelines for the RAE 2020, all RAE subject panels should make their evaluation with regard to the quality, rather than the publication venue of the published item, pitching at the best international norms and the standards of rigour and scholarship expected internationally in respective disciplines or sub-disciplines. It is a responsibility of Panel Convenors to ensure that all outputs that meet the criteria for being research outputs are assessed fairly.

75. Q: As the RAE panels include local members, is there a concern about fairness of the assessment by local members if they are affiliated to competing universities?

A: As stated in paragraph 3.5 of the Guidance Notes and paragraph 5 of the General Panel Guidelines, RAE panel members are appointed in their personal capacities, and should refrain from representing the interests of their affiliated institutions in the assessment of and deliberations on relevant submissions. The assignment and assessment of research

outputs should be based the match of members' expertise and caseload. Panel members will examine in detail the outputs, and put forward a recommendation with preliminary grading and comments to the panel or sub-group/sub-panel (if a panel decides to have sub-group(s)/sub-panel(s) for assessment) for a collective decision on the final grading. Panel Convenors will take care to guard against conflicts of interest.

76. Q: How will panel members be assigned to conduct the assessment of research outputs?

A: The guidelines and procedures for panels on the assignment of outputs for assessment are set out in paragraphs 25-28 of the General Panel Guidelines. It should be stressed that panels should base on the match of members' expertise and caseload in the assignment of outputs for assessment.

77. Q: Would ratings given by academic panel members and lay members be equally weighted?

A: Panels will exercise their expert judgement and give a collective rating based on the merits of the submissions. There is no provision that ratings by particular categories of panel members will weigh differently in the RAE 2020.

78. Q: If a reviewer makes comments that are not consistent with the regulations stated by UGC, will there be any mechanism within UGC to detect it, discuss the case, ask for amendments, or adjust the scores?

A: To ensure fairness and consistency, each research output will be assessed by at least two panel members, one of whom should be a non-local member to the extent possible. Following past practice, panel members' preliminary assessment and comments on individual submissions will be captured for tabling and discussion at the final assessment panel meetings. Any issues or observations from the Secretariat will be flagged for the Convenors and Deputy Convenors' steer and consideration at the panel meetings to ensure the final assessments are made in accordance with the guidelines. Should there be divergent views on the assessment of particular submissions, such cases should be fully discussed by the panels. Panels should give due consideration to individual assessors' comments, and make a considered judgement and collective decision on the final grading.

79. Q: **In case of a research output requiring two panels to assess, how will the decision be made on the assignment of panel members for assessing the output?**

A: According to paragraph 43 (b) of the General Panel Guidelines, in case of collective assessment by two or more panels, each panel will each assign one panel member to conduct the assessment.

80. Q: **In case the same inter-disciplinary output is submitted by different universities to different panels for assessment, will the two panels conduct grade moderation and minimise grade inconsistencies for the same output?**

And since the two panels receive the same output as the “primary panels”, which panel is going to make cross-panel referral and assign panel members to assess the output?

A: According the General Panel Guidelines, if the same output is submitted to two panels by different universities for assessment, the output will be handled by the respective panels according to their expert judgement within the overall framework of the RAE 2020 and their specific criteria in the Panel-specific Guidelines. While a panel may have the expertise to handle an inter-disciplinary output, another panel may decide to use cross-panel referral or external advice to assist with the assessment. An output may demonstrate originality, rigour and significance in a certain field, its academic merit may not always carry the same weight in another field.

Each of the two panels will assess the output by exercising their expert peer review and judgement according to the respective Panel-specific Guidelines. In principle, both panels may decide to initiate cross-panel referral.

81. Q: **Will there be more specific criteria that will be applied to determine whether an output should be referred to another panel? Can examples be given to illustrate such guidelines so as to minimise subjective elements?**

A: In addition to the guidance in the General Panel Guidelines, panels will elaborate on cross-panel referrals in the Panel-specific Guidelines. Paragraphs 41-43 of the General Panel Guidelines set out the provisions where panels may initiate cross-panel referrals based on the appropriate judgement of Panel Convenor, in consultation with relevant member(s)

of the panel.

(G) Results

82. Q: In what form will the results of RAE 2020 be published?

A: Results in the form of overall quality profiles and sub-profiles of individual elements of assessment will be published by unit of assessment and by panel at both individual university level and sector-wide level.

In addition to the published results, each university will receive their own RAE results confidentially in respect of research outputs at research area level.

The overall quality profile shows the proportion of research activity in the submission judged to meet the definitions of starred levels.

83. Q: Do “results of outputs at research area level” mean results at UoA level? Since a UoA shall comprise a minimum of three eligible staff, could a researcher’s identity be revealed in releasing results at research area level to universities?

A: Results in respect of outputs at research area are not the same as results at UoA level. As stated in the Guidance Notes, universities are required to assign each of their eligible academic staff to a research area and hence the corresponding UoA. This mapping of eligible staff serves the purpose of determining whether assessment results in respect of research outputs at research area level are to be generated. As a UoA may have more than one research area, and since universities should assign at least three eligible academic staff to each of the UoAs concerned, it is possible for a university to have fewer than three eligible staff assigned to a research area. In such a case, in order to avoid disclosure of results at the level of individual researchers, the results at research area level would not be released to the university.

84. Q: Will RAE results of individual departments of each university within the same UoA be released to the university? This would eliminate the need of the university to do an internal RAE to assess individual departments for funding purposes.

A: Following extensive consultation with universities on the RAE 2020, it

has been promulgated in the Framework and Guidance Notes that each university will receive their own RAE results confidentially in respect of research outputs at research area level. As individual universities are required to make one submission per UoA for the impact and environment elements, it is not possible to generate results of individual departments/faculty members/researchers within the UoA. Further, since universities have different departmental structure and their academic staff may be housed in different departments or research units, a uniform list of UoAs and respective research areas would have to be adopted in order to generate RAE results on research outputs at finer level.

85. Q: Will assessment results of individual faculty members/researchers be released, so that they may learn from their individual results and seek improvement?

A: As in the RAE 2014, the Guidance Notes for the RAE 2020 state that results will be published without disclosing the identities of individual academic staff members, in line with the principle that the RAE measures research quality on a UoA basis, not individual staff. More importantly, the academic development of individual faculty members/researchers should be a continuing process that involves dimensions other than research. As the RAE only covers up to four research outputs per academic staff in the six-year assessment period, its primary purpose is not intended to evaluate individual staff.

(H) Others

➤ Funding Allocation and Related Matter

86. Q: How will the RAE 2020 results be used by the UGC to determine funding allocation to the eight UGC-funded universities?

A: The UGC will decide on the funding methodology after the completion of the RAE 2020. Universities will be informed of the method used after the funding recommendations are accepted by the authorities.

87. Q: How much funding will be informed by the RAE 2020 results, and when will this be determined?

A: That will be for the UGC to decide in the light of its future budget and any future policy considerations. For information, in the 2016-19

triennium, the Research Portion of the Block Grant is about \$4.3 billion per year and 74% of the Research Portion is informed by the RAE 2014 results. The Research Portion is subsumed under the Block Grant to universities which are given the autonomy to allocate funds internally as they see fit.

Supplementary information

To promote research excellence, the UGC has originally decided that over a period of nine years since 2012/13, the allocation based on success of Research Grants Council (RGC) Earmarked Research Grant projects will gradually increase to 50% of the Research Portion, while the allocation informed by the RAE results will gradually reduce to 50% of the Research Portion. In 2017, in response to the stakeholders' concerns expressed in the Review of the RGC (Phase I) that the competitive allocation mechanism had amplified some institutional behaviours, the UGC approved the interim arrangement to "freeze" the percentage of the competitive part of the Research Portion at the 2016/17 level, i.e. 26%, since 2017/18 pending a further Research Portion Review is completed.

88. Q: Will UGC share the costs borne by universities in undertaking the RAE 2020?

A: The UGC will bear half of the licence fee in respect of copyright clearance for the research outputs submitted for assessment in the RAE 2020, subject to a maximum of \$450 per research output.

➤ ***Release of RAE Information***

89. Q: When will the panel-specific criteria and requirements be made known to universities?

A: According to the timetable for RAE 2020 which was issued to universities in October 2017 and published on the UGC website at <http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/activity/research/rae/rae2020.html>, the General Panel Guidelines and Panel-specific Guidelines on Assessment Criteria and Working Methods (Panel-specific Guidelines) will be announced to universities tentatively in September 2018, about 14 months before the due dates for universities to make submissions for the RAE 2020. The Panel-specific Guidelines will include details on individual RAE panels' guidance and requirements on research outputs, impact and environment.

➤ *Trial Assessment*

90. Q: **Will there be any special procedures and instructions in place for subsequent handling of the outputs selected in the sample for trial assessment? There is concern that panelists may form an impression of the sampled outputs before the final criteria are in place.**

A: Paragraph 91 of the General Panel Guidelines suggests that the trial assessment be conducted by all members of the panel, who will then discuss their observations, with a view to enabling standardisation of approaches and fine-tuning of the process. As suggested in paragraph 61 of the template for Panel-specific Guidelines, submissions used for the trial assessment will be assessed afresh during the main assessment period regardless of their assessment results during the trial assessment. Panel members are appointed to carry out the assessment in a fair and impartial manner. Panels will decide on the choice of samples for trial assessment, and they will be reminded to proceed with the subsequent formal assessment according to the published guidelines and standards. The advantages of the trial assessment remain that it will enable valuable learning, standardisation of approaches, and “fine tuning” of the process.

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UGC Secretariat
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