

# UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMITTEE

## Research Assessment Exercise 2020

### Workshop on Impact Submissions on 14 January 2019

#### Questions raised by UGC-funded Universities / Participants and Response to the Questions

Please note: In this document, ‘GN’ refers to the *Guidance Notes*, ‘GPG’ and ‘PSG’ refer to the *General Panel Guidelines* and *Panel-specific Guidelines* for the RAE 2020 respectively. Associated numbers refer to paragraphs in those documents. ‘FAQ’ refers to the list of *Questions and Answers (Q&As) on RAE 2020*. These are all on the UGC’s website on RAE 2020.

*[Update in March 2019: Addition of entries on Panel 6 Q.6 and Panel 11 Q.7- Q.10.]*

#### (A) General Questions

##### *Confidential information in impact case*

- Q.1 How shall we deal with concerns over privacy and/or confidentiality? For examples, the writer of a testimonial prefers not to disclose his/her name, position, and/or organization, or an organization does not want to disclose some information.
- Q.2 Can UGC provide further information about the **confidentiality arrangements** for impact case studies?
- e.g. Will case studies be published? Will they be shared beyond UGC and the panels?
- Q.3 How will panels assess the two star quality of research if all (or some of) the underpinning **research outputs are commercially sensitive** or in confidential government reports?
- Q.4 Are there any arrangements for confidential elements of case studies to be removed from publication? This could be through redaction or removal from publication.

Response to Q.1-4: GPG 72-77 explain the general provisions regarding anonymity and information security for the RAE.

More specifically, please note:

- Case studies will be published, so universities need to consider this in selecting them.

- Panels need the required evidence to be presented in ways that give the necessary information. This includes the names and affiliations of authors of testimonials; and the full underpinning research.
- However, the UGC recognises that submissions may contain material which is patentable, commercially confidential, or which in the interests of the university and/or its researchers is required to be given a restricted circulation (GPG 75). UGC will further compare the existing procedures on handling confidentiality and information security with those in other jurisdictions and deliberate on any further procedures worth considering. Universities will be informed of any update in this regard. Universities should take into account the processes to be followed in judging what to submit having regard to any potential consequence and risks of submitting proprietary research or commercially sensitive information in their impact submissions.

Therefore:

- (a) Universities should submit full versions of impact overview statements and impact case studies for panel assessment, but will also be able to indicate any part(s) of those submissions which are not suitable for publication (having regard to confidentiality, commercial sensitivity or privacy elements in the content of the submission).
- (b) In such cases, they should submit, in parallel, a redacted version of impact overview statements and impact case studies with relevant parts (e.g. names, listed outputs) masked/removed. The redacted version will be published after release of the RAE results.
- (c) The full version of the research referenced in impact case studies as well as the original supporting documents (e.g. confidential reports or private letters/testimonials) and personal information in relation to sources to corroborate the impact will be made available to panels. But the details of these supporting materials will be restricted to the panels and secretariat and will not be published.
- (d) Universities may also request that an entire impact submission be exempted from publication, subject to the UGC's approval.
- (e) Further guidance on these arrangements will be provided in advance of the release of the electronic system.

### ***Evidence to demonstrate impact***

Q.5 How is impact measured/evidenced for non-traditional outputs such as video artworks and short films?

Response to Q.5: In the same way as for traditional outputs. It is important to state

clearly the claimed impact, and to explain how the underpinning research contributed to that impact.

Q.6 Since only a maximum of 10 sources shall be made to corroborate impact, would you define more clearly how you would count as one piece of “evidence”? Can we combine similar/ relevant information as one source? For example, can we provide a website link that includes different testimonials obtained throughout the research project? Or can we merge different documents provided by the same institution (e.g., several minutes of meeting, email circulation, etc.).

Response to Q.6: The requirement sets an indicative limit of 10 sources of corroboration. Some could be multi-authored, but simply compressing distinct sources into one composite ‘source’ is not appropriate. In any case, 10 is regarded as a sufficiently large number, and should amply meet the evidence requirement.

Please also note that the overall space limits for case studies (GN Appendix H) must be observed.

Q.7 It is difficult to obtain evidence (e.g., testimonial) from government agencies to support the impact on policy formulation. Would this have any bearing on the assessment on impact cases in relation to policy review/development? Would the government encourage and give guidance to its officials to provide testimony to universities whose research have had effect during the policy making process?

Q.8 Will UGC issue guidelines to various government departments about providing supporting letters for impact case studies? In many cases the policy documents do not cite the research on which they are based, and a letter clearly stating that the work done has contributed towards policy development is needed to establish the link.

Response to Q.7-8: As outlined in FAQ 50, the UGC Chairman may write to relevant government departments, if so requested by universities, to appeal for their support to provide relevant data/information as evidence of impact.

Anyone considering submitting a case study based on a policy impact might also find of interest this UK contribution <<https://wonkhe.com/blogs/how-to-have-ref-able-policy-impact/>>.

Q.9 Do you have any recommendations for the format to be adopted for gathering testimonials? If beneficiaries are approached to affirm and spell out impact they have experienced, who should their responses be addressed to? The researcher or UGC?

Q.10 If a testimonial is included as evidence of the impact case study, whom

should the testimonial be addressed to, UGC or the researcher concerned?

Response to Q.9-10: Please note that the requirement is for ‘sources’ that can provide corroboration, not necessarily ‘testimonials’ (e.g., a government report, or an academic analysis done externally to the submitting university, that testifies to the significance of the underpinning research in leading to the claimed impact).

Each university should decide how to seek, specifically, testimonials (whether to do so centrally, or leave it to each Unit of Assessment (UoA)). Testimonials should be sent to the University/UoA.

Q.11 For data such as media reach, are rough estimates acceptable or is audited circulation/viewing data needed?

Q.12 Is there a checking process for verifying indicators and quantitative data that support the claims for the impact achieved?

Response to Q.11-12: Some evidence, of its nature, is bound to be approximate, or an estimate, but there must be a solid and reasoned basis to it, which must be explained and be auditable, and which the panel must be able to check.

See GN 7.10(e).

Q.13 It is noted in paragraph 7.3 of GN that “the positive effects on capacity / opportunity” or “reduction of cost” could also be included as “impact”. How will these impacts be evaluated, or what evidence should the researcher provide to show this potential impact in the future?

Response to Q.13: Potential Impact ‘in the future’ is not relevant. The claimed impact must have happened already.

Evaluation of impacts will be by the processes specified in the GN and PSG.

Q.14 If a piece of research has outputs in top publications and a patent, which has secured commercial funding and has had trials for commercialisation, but it has not yet been realised in the market, is this admissible as an impact case study?

Response to Q.14: While impacts could be at different stages of development, the impacts being submitted for assessment must occur in the assessment period from 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2019. If a case study is based on potential future impact that has not yet materialised, it will not be possible to provide evidence for demonstrating the reach and significance of the impact claimed. It is advisable to select impact cases that are as tangible as possible, with clear evidence of impact and significance *already achieved*.

Q.15 Will the supporting evidence be used to directly evaluate the quality of an

impact case? Or is it just for verification purposes?

Response to Q.15: The purpose is to corroborate the claimed impact. The more completely the corroborating source supports the entire narrative (in the best case, showing both how the underpinning research contributed to the claimed impact, and what the reach and significance of the impact was), the better. But corroboration of the narrative, or elements of it, is distinct from evaluating the quality of the impact.

Q.16 If comments from a social media page/group (e.g. Facebook) are used as evidence for impact, is it ethical to do so without telling the page/group users or beneficiaries? How to present such evidence in a case study if the collected comments are numerous?

Response to Q.16: If the comments are drawn from a closed group with restricted access, it is advisable to seek permission in advance. For example, evidence for impact on a particular school curriculum may involve feedback and letters which identify individuals. In such cases, it is advisable to seek permission and explain clearly how the material is intended to be used.

It might be easier to avoid this kind of issue by citing quantitative data or selecting straightforwardly useable quotes as evidence for the impact claimed. It may also be helpful to refer to highly rated impact case studies from the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 for examples of how they presented evidence of impact.

Q.17 Is there any advice on using links to the internet as a source of evidence for impact? Should the linked evidence be downloaded at a particular date and time for submission?

Response to Q.17: Universities are advised to be careful about relying on links to the internet in their impact submissions. The contents of an impact case study should be self-contained (so you should not expect panel members to follow up any links to understand the content) and the sources for corroborating the impact should be easily and reliably available for panels to check. As space is finite for presenting the impact and its evidence, universities are advised to use the best source/link(s) in the case studies.

### ***Multi-disciplinary impact/underpinning research***

Q.18 Where UoAs have joint research projects with overlapping impact, are they encouraged to submit related cases, and work together in preparing them?

Q.19 Assuming that the UoA is only able to submit one case study, do you think it is better to focus on one researcher's work in detail, or to try and combine the work of more than one researcher into the same case study? What about if the

impacts (e.g. outreach activities) of researchers are similar, but the underpinning research is not (i.e., how unified does the ‘research, research activity or body of work’ need to be?).

Response to Q.18-19: The focus of assessment is the impact achieved by the submitting UoA, not the impact of individuals or individual research outputs (GN 8.1).

As outlined in FAQ 42, impact case studies submitted by different units of the same university should, in principle, 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 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.

So the same research, done jointly by two UoAs, would be expected to contribute to different impact case studies (though they may overlap). Note also GN 7.9, which encourages the selection of case studies that are the strongest examples to present the impacts generated or substantially supported by the submitting unit.

Q.20 What is the arrangement for assessing impact cases which are multidisciplinary in nature?

Response to Q.20: Please see response to Q.18-19.

GPG 39-43 specify arrangements for the review of inter-disciplinary research and for cross-panel referrals. These arrangements will also apply to impact case studies if panels consider it necessary.

### ***Underpinning research***

Q.21 Since underpinning research refers not merely to research but also “research activity or a body of work derived from research” (p.19 of GN), is it correct to think that journal publication is not the only indicator, but also research report, conference paper, etc.?

Q.22 If an impact case study is underpinned by research with research report, book chapter, conference paper, etc. but limited or no journal publication, would it still be accepted?

Q.23 For ‘references to the research’, can we include information other than journal publications, such as book chapter, conference paper, research report, grant, award, etc.?

Q.24 Is it necessary for each and every impact activity to be directly linked to a research output and/or a research grant?

Response to Q.21-24: GN 5.9 states that research outputs can take many forms. Subject to any specific provisions in the relevant PSG, this applies also to the underpinning research.

It is not necessary for an impact case to link to a research grant, but it must link to the research that is claimed to underpin it.

Q.25 Must *all* the underpinning research referenced in an impact case study be of at least 2 star (2\*) quality? Is there any leeway of accepting the quality of underpinning research as *predominantly* 2\* similar to the REF in the UK?

Q.26 How can universities ascertain the underpinning research is of 2\* quality when research outputs were published 10-15 years ago / not assessed in previous RAE in starred quality levels / are in form of cartoon books or popular works?

Response to Q.25-26: GN 7.6 and 7.7(c) state that impacts must be underpinned by research, research activity or a body of work derived from research, and the quality of underpinning research should be equivalent to at least 2 star (2\*), i.e. of international standing. The underpinning research does not need to have been assessed in previous RAE as attaining 2\* standard. What matters is that the body of work cited as underpinning the claimed impact is of international standing, in the normal understanding of what that means according to the norms of the field(s) in question. The normal professional practice of researchers in the field(s) in question should provide sufficient reassurance, but in addition PSG provide elaborations on what panels regard as 2\* for underpinning research.

From the Workshop presenters' experience in the UK REF 2014, when thousands of impact case studies were submitted, only a handful were rated unclassified because the underpinning research was considered below 2\* standard. Universities appeared to have little difficulty in applying their own judgment about whether the underpinning research was of international standard.

Universities are therefore advised to present their best examples of impact and select key outputs from the research that underpinned the claimed impact. The research can be in any of the forms that are accepted for the RAE. In the case of cartoon books or popular works, the mainstream research outputs that underpinned them can be cited.

### ***Researchers involved in impact***

Q.27 Can the impact activities conducted by current academic staff (but not RAE eligible for the assessment of research output element, e.g. research staff, lecturer, adjunct professor) be included in the Impact Case Study or Impact

## Overview Statement?

Q.28 Can the impact activities conducted by former academic staff be included in the Impact Case Study or Impact Overview Statement if the activities were conducted in the assessment period?

Response to Q.27-28: Yes. See also response to Q.29-30.

Q.29 How should researchers be credited with impact when:

- a. It is a collaborative work with another university/UoA within the university. In such cases, does the researcher need to be the Principal Investigator (PI)?
- b. If the impact has been generated indirectly, by other academics/organisations, building on the original published research to generate the knowledge transfer? (in particular when not involving any KT (Knowledge Transfer) agreement).

Q.30 **Eligibility**: Given that case studies can be based on research from non-eligible staff, can case studies be underpinned by research that was started by someone whilst they were doing their PhD at the university, if they subsequently became a research staff member?

Response to Q.29-30: Note GN 7.1: the submission about impact is made on a UoA basis. It is the submitting universities/units being assessed for their achievement in impact, not individual staff/researchers. The impacts must have been enabled by the submitting university, and been underpinned by research undertaken at, or significantly supported by, the submitting university during the specified period.

Note also GN 7.6: Impacts underpinned by research of non-eligible academic staff may be selected by universities. It does not matter if the researchers concerned are not eligible staff of the submitting university, or are no longer employed by the university.

It therefore does not matter whether or not the researcher responsible for the underpinning research was the PI; nor whether the research was done collaboratively with another UoA or another university (provided the submitting university can meet the criterion at GN 7.1).

With respect to Q.29b: note GN 7.1, especially ‘impacts must have been enabled by the submitting university’. Also GN 7.9, (selection of case studies that are the strongest examples to present the impacts generated or substantially supported by the submitting unit). A case where another organisation has generated an impact essentially independently of the UoA may not make a strong submission, so careful thought should be given to the selection of any such case.

A KT agreement does not need to be part of the impact process, though it could be



used as evidence of the relationship between the UoA and the ultimate user. However, a KT agreement in itself is not ‘impact’: see the definition at GN 7.3.

Finally, with respect to Q.29, the answer is Yes, provided that the underpinning research was undertaken at, or significantly supported by, the submitting unit/university. Again, it does not matter if the researchers concerned are not eligible academic staff of the submitting university or no longer employed by the university.

Q.31 How will an impact case be assessed if it is co-developed by two different universities, with contributions of, say, 75% from University A and 25% from University B?

Response to Q.31: If two universities submit the same impact case with different contributions to the impact claimed, the receiving panel or panels will assess each submission according to the published guidelines. With reference to GN 7.6 and 7.9 and as outlined in FAQ 41, impact case study(ies) should be the strongest example(s) selected to present the impacts that are generated or substantially supported by the unit of assessment. Where an impact involves collaborations of multiple units/universities within the same or across different UoAs, each unit/university may submit a case study of the impact so long as it has made a distinct and material research contribution to the impact taking/taken place. It is not expected that each of the collaborating universities makes the same contribution to the impact claimed, nor that they will submit identical impact case studies. Instead, each university should clearly describe their own contributions and pathways leading to the impact in their case studies.

### *Assessment of impact*

Q.32 Since certain UoAs are newly developed, and the impacts generated may not be as sophisticated as the same UoAs in other institutions. In addition, different scalars and multipliers (e.g. research infrastructure/staff size, historical funding patterns, and environmental history) would also have effect on the impact as well. How would UGC mitigate such differences to ensure fairness, as the RAE results would inform RGC funding?

Response to Q.32: Please note GN 2.18: Differences among submitting universities/units in terms of staff size, resources and histories will not form part of the assessment. Rather, due regard to the differences should be given when interpreting the RAE results.

This principle was reiterated in “Supplementary Note on UGC’s Deliberations on Comments Received during Consultation” issued to universities and published in July 2018 alongside the GN. Paragraphs 6-9 confirmed that impact and environment should be assessed solely on their merits with no consideration given to the differences among the submitting universities/units in terms of staff size, resources,

histories, and that there should be no discounting/crediting factor arising from the career stage and staff profile information of individual universities/units.

Q.33 Apart from “Reach and Significance”, would more details about the assessment rubrics of impact be disseminated to Universities?

Q.34 Would certain weightings be assigned for each section of the impact case?

Q.35 It seems that each case and the impact overview statement will be rated separately and the ratings will be aggregated to form an overall impact profile. Is this the case? What are the respective weightings for the cases and overview statement in the overall impact assessment? Would the ‘impact overview statement’ take up a proportion of weighting in the panels’ overall assessment of an impact submission?

Q.36 Please describe the practical criteria one would use to gauge the reach and significance of impact cases.

Q.37 **Grading research impacts:** how will panels weight the Impact Overview Statement compared to the Impact Case Studies (in order to make 15%), and will all panels do the same?

Response to Q.33-37: PSG, in varying ways as preferred by each panel, offer further advice on ‘reach’ and ‘significance’.

Panels will not apply weightings to the different elements within the Impact submission. They will look at the impact overview statement and case studies holistically and form an overall view about reach and significance taken as a whole. See GN 8.2-8.3.

Q.38 According to 7.10(d) at p.21 of GN, in the impact case studies, there should be a narrative explaining the extent of impact but also ‘how the submitting unit made a contribution to the impact in the assessment period...’

Is this element forming part of the assessment criteria? It doesn’t seem to be, and if not how does the panel expect to take account of any contribution the submitting unit made or did not make to the achievement of impact?

Response to Q.38: Please see GN 8.3: Taking the impact *overview statement* and *case study(ies)* as a whole, panels will exercise their expert judgment and give a collective rating based on the merits of each impact submission.

In so doing, panels will consider the extent to which the unit’s approach described in the *overview statement* is conducive to achieving impact of reach and significance (see GN 8.2).

The statement will therefore provide context to assist the panel in assessing the detailed narrative within case studies with particular respect to understanding how

the submitting unit made contributions to the impact.

Q.39 How would potentially negative or controversial research, such as that of a genetically-engineered human embryo, be assessed for its impact in the RAE?

Response to Q.39: To answer this question, we need to be clear about the distinction between *research* and *impact*.

The underpinning *research* must be of at least 2\* (international) standing. Provided it meets this standard, it does not matter whether it is controversial or not.

The definition of *impact* for RAE 2020 is given at GN 7.3-7.6. This definition states that impact includes ‘reduction or prevention of harm’ as well as ‘positively’ beneficial impacts, and also requires that it would not have happened without the underpinning research. The PSG provide examples of impacts relevant to the respective panels. So in judging the appropriateness of a potential impact case, these are the tests that should be applied.

### ***Who will assess impact submissions***

Q.40 Who will read the impact submissions and make assessment? What are the criteria for determining the number of panel members in assessing impact cases? The guidelines state that there will be more than two assessors in assessing once case, and one of whom must be a lay member of the panel. Is there a ratio of lay members to other assessors? If yes, what is it?

Q.41 Can you provide us with more information on who the **reviewers**, particularly the lay members, will be in each panel?

Response to Q.40-41: GPG 44 describes the general process, and the numbers involved, for assigning impact cases to panel members, including the impact assessors. Assessment by lay members serves to cross-check with other assessors’ judgement on the submissions. The final judgement, however, rests on the consensus of the whole panel, in that panels give due consideration to individual assessors’ judgements and make a collective decision on the final grading.

Panel size is taken into account when appointing impact assessors. Additional external reviewers (including impact assessors) can be engaged as necessary during the assessment process to advise on submissions that are beyond the capacity of panel members.

Convenors and Deputy Convenors of the 13 panels have been appointed and the list is available on the UGC website. Appointment of other panel members is underway.

Full panel membership details, including Convenor, Deputy Convenor, local/non-local academic members and local lay members, will be published after universities have made their submissions. The names and expertise information of

any additional external reviewers, subsequently engaged, were not publicised in previous exercises and there is no plan to do so in RAE 2020.

### *Others*

Q.42 Since one of the objectives of RAE 2020 is to drive excellence and encourage world class research, it would be of benefit to the universities if UGC would provide not only the overall quality profile to the universities but also the sub-profiles and sector average of the outputs, impact and environment for local benchmarking and improvement purposes.

Response to Q.42: As set out in GN 11.3, 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 will show the proportion of research activity in the submission judged to meet the definitions of starred levels.

Q.43 What are the tips for “must do” and “must not do”?

Response to Q.43: See the requirements in detail in GN and PSG, and presentations at the 14 January 2019 Workshop.

Q.44 If a UoA has made significant progress in terms of impact in a certain research area, is it advisable for it to submit an impact case on the same area that it has submitted in a previous assessment exercise? The answer to this is useful for longer-term planning for research assessment exercises beyond 2020.

Response to Q.44: GN 7.9 encourages selection of case studies that are the strongest examples to present the impacts generated or substantially supported by the submitting unit. The University must decide which these are, in the light of all the available options.

Q.45 Does the University need to provide **translations** of all a) research references and b) impact evidence sources, if not in English? Or can these be provided in original language if audited?

Response to Q.45: If translation of research referenced in any impact studies and/or of sources to corroborate the impact is required by a panel, the UGC Secretariat will contact the submitting universities to arrange translation and sending back the translated version for the Panel’s assessment. With a view to facilitating panels’

review of such materials, universities will be requested to flag in their submissions if any references/sources of an impact case study are originally not in the English language.

Q.46 There are concerns about fatigue and bias of panels in relation to universities' selection of impact cases for assessment. What is the advice on this?

Response to Q.46: One of the responsibilities of Panel Convenors is to seek to ensure fairness in the handling of all submissions. Submitting universities/UoAs can help by making their impact cases clear and easy to read, and as strong as possible. While the impact overview statement provides a context on the submitting unit's approach to impact, it is worth noting that impact submission is a 'team game'. It is possible for some parts of a department/submitting unit to be drawn on more in impact case studies than others. The submitting unit should put forward its strongest cases, and not merely submit case studies from each individual group within the unit.

Q.47 Other than the scales of staff for determining the number of case study(ies) required for submissions, is there any difference between the impact assessment in the UK REF 2014 and the Hong Kong RAE 2020?

Response to Q.47: There are detailed points of difference, but RAE 2020 broadly adopts similar assessment criteria and principles as the UK REF 2014. Anyone familiar with the UK system should find that experience transferable to the Hong Kong system.

## **(B) Panel-specific Questions**

### ***Panel 1 – Biology***

Q.1 How to assess those impacts with evidence solely based on public clips (such as news, media)? Does the language of the evidence matter (e.g. news in English vs in Chinese)? In other words, how to assess the societal impacts based on evidences?

Response to Panel 1 Q.1: Please see response to Q.45 under Section (A) above. Beyond that, the processes for assessing impacts of the kinds referred to here will be the same as for all other kinds of impact, and the assessment of impact will similarly be in terms of reach and significance.

It is important to be clear what function any public news, etc., clips are serving. A news report about a piece of research is not evidence of impact. But a news clip showing public debate generated by the research might be evidence of impact.

Q.2 What is the proportion of basic research, translational science, product

commercialization, and social impact to be provided in the case study?

Response to Panel 1 Q.2: No such proportions are specified. GN 7.10 specifies the information needed about underpinning research.

Q.3 Is it necessary to provide the PI's profile (including his/her achievement) in the impact case study?

Response to Panel 1 Q.3: See response to Q.29 under Section (A) above. No, the focus of assessment is the impact achieved by the submitting unit, not the impact of individuals (GN 8.1).

Q.4 [*Question related to environment*] What exact information should be provided under the section (7) - Esteem in the environment overview statement (to distinct from impact)?

Response to Panel 1 Q.4: GN 9.5 (e) describes what is in general required under Environment/esteem. 'Esteem' is about academic achievement, not Impact as defined in GN 7.3.

Please see also Panel 1's PSG paragraph 32, which state that submitting units are required to describe in the 'Impact Overview Statement' 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.

Paragraph 46 of those guidelines also gives further information about what could be included in the 'Environment Overview Statement' under 'esteem'.

### ***Panel 3 – Physical Sciences***

Q.1 What kind of evidence is expected to be obtained from private companies? How specific the evidence should be? Is it acceptable to submit evidence like publicity of the private companies?

Response to Panel 3 Q.1: Evidence of impact can come from a wide variety of sources. There is no fixed prescription. But evidence must be provided to corroborate the claims of the reach or significance of the impact and of the contribution of the underpinning research as specified in GN section VII and any PSG.

Q.2 Documents from Hong Kong government are not easily accessible. What kind of evidence can we request to provide from the government departments? What kinds of evidence from them are acceptable or recognized by the panel?

Response to Panel 3 Q.2: See response to Q.7-9 under Section (A) above. Note also that published documents other than testimonials, e.g. a government report, or an academic analysis done externally to the submitting university, can testify to the significance of the underpinning research in leading to the claimed impact. Beyond that, the kind of evidence to ask for depends upon what is being claimed about the impact of the underpinning research and the pathway between that research and the impact.

#### ***Panel 4 – Electrical & Electronic Engineering***

Q.1 Most panels, with the exception of Panels 4 & 11, have provided some examples of evidence/indicators of the quality of underpinning research (e.g. number of citations, peer-review funding received, etc.). Why there are no specific examples provided by Panels 4 & 11? We suggest UGC to provide clearer guidelines in relation to underpinning research quality for the above-mentioned panels.

Response to Panel 4 Q.1: The published GN give guidance about the criteria for assessing the quality of research outputs. These apply equally to assessing (or demonstrating) the quality of research claimed to underpin impact submissions.

Beyond that, panels were free to decide whether they considered anything further should be included in their PSG. Where panels chose not to elaborate further, some insight can be obtained, if so wished, by scanning what other panels are suggesting – where the list includes peer review processes (for publication or funding), citations, and awards won.

#### ***Panel 6 – Engineering Panel***

Q.1 Science is about “Discovery” while Engineering is about “Innovation” and “Invention”. However, research assessment of Engineering discipline is often using methods and means for assessing the Science discipline. Would this impact submission assessment be the same for Science and Engineering?

Response to Panel 6 Q.1: The RAE is based on a broadly consistent approach across all disciplines. In respect of Impact, as for the other elements of the process, assessment will be by expert panels having regard to disciplinary differences (see GN 8.1).

Q.2 If the PI of the impact case has already left/deceased/retired, please advise whether the impact case can be submitted by the UoA on condition that the research findings mentioned in the impact case were contributed by the faculty member during his/her employment in the institution which covered part of the assessment period?

Response to Panel 6 Q.2: See response to Q.27-30 under Section (A) above. If the

conditions in GN 7.6 are met, then yes.

Q.3 There are several faculty members participated in the research underpinning the impact case but one of the major PIs has left the university/deceased. For section (3) in the impact case study template - References to the Research, is it a mandatory requirement to include the relevant research outputs of every team member to demonstrate their contributions? Would it be fine if we only list the research outputs of the major PI in section (3) as long as his/her research outputs are considered as the most indicative to the impact case?

Response to Panel 6 Q.3: The university must judge what references to the underpinning research to include, taking into account in particular GN 7.9 (Universities are only required to give examples of evidence of impact ... instead of a comprehensive account of where all their research has led), and GN 7.10(c) (references to key outputs from the underpinning research).

Q.4 [*Question related to research output*] We are fully aware that the research outputs will be assessed based on the research quality. In the specific guidelines for Engineering Panel, co-authors are required to provide a statement outlining the significant contribution in the cases where there are more than 6 co-authors and where the submitting faculty is neither the first or last nor corresponding co-author. Given this specific guideline on co-authored publications, should we still go for quality if the paper is of very high quality from very top journal but with 100 co-authors? Or should it be safer to submit a paper of 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> tier in which the submitting faculty is the first author?

Response to Panel 6 Q.4: This question can only be answered by the University/UoA itself, in the context of this item's place within the overall portfolio of outputs being presented and the originality, significance and rigour of the outputs in question. The statement referred to in the question is intended to help the Panel make an informed judgment about the contribution of the individual researcher to the multi-authored output.

Q.5 [*Question related to research output*] It is very common for faculty members to conduct cross-disciplinary research. For example, Electronic & Computer Engineering faculty may also work on research in Computer Science and may choose to submit top conference papers in Computer Science for RAE 2020. How would these papers be rated? If conference paper can be submitted, what criteria can be used? Is peer-review one of the criteria?

Response to Panel 6 Q.5: Cross-disciplinary work is welcomed. Procedures for handling it are at GPG 39-43. Some supplementary information may be found in



PSG.

Conference papers can be submitted (see GN Appendix F) and will be assessed in the same way as all other output types.

Q.6 [*Question related to research output*] We are fully aware that research output evaluation is based on the quality of the output itself. Given that the Engineering Panel requires co-author to give a statement outlining the significant contribution if his/her paper has more than 6 co-authors and he/she is neither first or last nor corresponding co-author, we face the difficulty to make the best choice between these two papers:

- (a) paper from very top journals, such as Nature, which have around 100 co-authors;
- (b) paper of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> tier but with less than 6 co-authors.

Response to Panel 6 Q.6: This question is similar to the question of Panel 6 Q.4 above. The above response stands. In addition, while we recognise the dilemma that is raised in the question, it is not possible to give a more specific answer because so much depends on the precise nature of the research output, especially its originality and significance, and the specific contribution of the co-author. To take examples from different fields, being one out a hundred authors of a paper of great originality and profound significance (e.g., something of the standing of the Watson/Crick paper on the structure of DNA, or the prediction of the existence of the Higgs Boson) might be more worthwhile submitting than one where the researcher is the first named of two authors of a more modest contribution.

### ***Panel 8 – Law***

Q.1 Can a successful impact case submission be made that includes more than one impact study (i.e., several cases in the same field, such as constitutional law, or laws relating to minorities)? If so, what does the submission need to do?

Response to Panel 8 Q.1: GN 7.10 outlines the requirements for an impact case study. For the number of case studies required, see GN 7.7. The choice of subjects is for the University, bearing in mind GN 7.9 (the impact case study(ies) should be the strongest example(s) selected to present the impacts generated or substantially supported by the submitting unit). If more than one case study is required, they do not all have to be within the same field of Law. If the question is whether multiple research projects can contribute to a single impact case study, the answer is yes, if they all underpin the impact that is being claimed and meet the required 2\* quality standard.

Q.2a If there has been a lot of activity centred on public engagement - explaining findings to the public, writing articles for the media, setting up websites, etc. -

but these fail to produce change due to circumstances beyond researchers' control (such as a change in the political environment), can such activity still be considered impact if it contributed to public debate? If so, what kind of evidence would make such a case convincing?

Response to Panel 8 Q.2a: Impact is defined in GN 7.3. Activity derived from the underpinning research does not in itself constitute impact. It has to have a demonstrable effect, for which supporting evidence can be adduced.

Q.2b Further to Q.2a, is the response in relation to Panel 8 above also shared among the other panels?

Response to Panel 8 Q.2b: Yes. All panels work in a consistent way in accordance with the general guidelines of the exercise. There are detailed differences, as laid out in the PSG, but these relate to specific, and relatively limited, variations in academic practice between disciplines, not to the overall principles of the assessment process.

Q.3 If impact is very local, for instance changes to a local law, is it still considered worthy of four stars if it does not have international impacts? How big should the scope be?

Response to Panel 8 Q.3: Impacts will be assessed in terms of their reach and significance regardless of the geographical location in which they occurred (GN 8.1). But account will be taken of the implications of the location for what it is appropriate to expect of Reach.

For example, Panel 8's PSG, paragraph 41, state that:

‘reach will be not be assessed in purely geographic terms, nor in terms of absolute numbers of beneficiaries, but rather in terms of the extent to which the potential number or groups of beneficiaries have been affected. It is, for example, recognised that a policy issue affecting Hong Kong uniquely has that region as the potential domain for the impact, and that defines the boundaries of the possible reach achievable.’

Panels will form an overall view about reach and significance taken as a whole (GN 8.2). So it is possible for a combination of relatively geographically limited reach (local impact) and high degree of significance (degree to which the impact has changed something important for a local population) to achieve a high rating. All will depend on the specifics of the submission.

### ***Panel 9 – Business & Economics***

Q.1 In the general panel and panel specific guidelines, it is stated that the impact overview statement should include context, approach to impact, strategy and plans, and relationship to case studies. In the impact overview statement, in

addition to the submitted impact case studies, can we describe other examples of impacts generated by a submitting unit? How important is the impact overview statement relative to the submitted impact case studies in grading research impacts of a submitting unit?

Response to Panel 9 Q.1: GN 7.8 and Appendix G state the purpose and required content of the impact overview statement. It is important to stay within the specified page limit. Note also the reference in GN 7.9 to the requirement to give examples, the strongest examples, to present the impacts that are generated or substantially supported by the submitting unit, and not necessarily to comprehensively represent the spread of research activities within the submitting unit.

Q.2 It is quite difficult to find direct linkage between research and policy, because policy makers usually don't make clear reference to research findings. For impacts on public policy, is it sufficient to provide indirect evidence such as serving on government committees or engagement in policy debate?

Response to Panel 9 Q.2: Impact is defined in GN 7.3. Activity derived from the underpinning research does not in itself constitute impact. It has to have a demonstrable effect, for which supporting evidence can be adduced.

### ***Panel 11 – Humanities Panel***

Q.1 Does the impact case study need to be published before submission?

Response to Panel 11 Q.1: No. It will be published by the UGC after the RAE is concluded.

Q.2 Definition and examples for demonstrating “impacts”.

Response to Panel 11 Q.2: Please see GN 7.3 and the PSG for definition and examples.

Q.3 Do publishing books/edited books and live broadcast of classes count as research impact? If so, how they may be rated relative to other kinds of impact?

Response to Panel 11 Q.3: No. See the definition of Impact at GN 7.3. Activity derived from the underpinning research does not in itself constitute impact. It has to have a demonstrable effect, for which supporting evidence can be adduced.

Q.4 In the PSG for Panel 11,

*“The Panel expects the scholars responsible for the research to make their own judgements regarding the level of quality, and to present their argument as to why it meets the required standard.”*

Questions:

- a. What kind of information, evidence or indicators are expected as an argument to prove the quality of the underpinning research?
- b. Should the argument be written in the text of the Impact Case Study or provided as an attachment or weblink?

Response to Panel 11 Q.4a: This wording deliberately leaves scope for UoAs to present an argument in their own terms, but respondents may wish to consider applying the same approach as they would to judging the quality of research outputs – as in GN section VI.

See also response to Panel 4 Q.1 above.

Response to Panel 11 Q.4b: This could be done within (or across both of) sections 2 & 3 of GN Appendix H (Underpinning Research; and References to the research), depending on how you wish to present the argument.

Q.5 The UoA 33 (linguistics & language studies) plans to have an impact case involving linguistic corpus. If there are industrial parties that are using the corpus data to develop some daily life applications, are these applications and collaborations considered KT and creating social impact?

Response to Panel 11 Q.5: KT in itself is not ‘impact’: see the definition at GN 7.3. Evidence that industrial parties have changed their practice as a result of the underpinning research would, however, be relevant.

Q.6 Most panels, with the exception of Panels 4 & 11, have provided some examples of evidence/ indicators of the quality of underpinning research (e.g. number of citations, peer-review funding received, etc.). Why there are no specific examples provided by Panels 4 & 11? We suggest UGC to provide clearer guidelines in relation to underpinning research quality for the above-mentioned panels.

Response to Panel 11 Q.6: The published GN give guidance about the criteria for assessing the quality of research outputs. These apply equally to the quality of research claimed to underpin impact submissions. Beyond that, panels were free to decide whether they considered anything further should be included in their PSG. See also response to Panel 4 Q.1 above.

Q.7 Can the underpinning research be in the form of literary fiction or essays, given that the researcher in question is a professor of creative writing?

Response to Panel 11 Q.7: In principle, yes. Paragraphs 11-15 of the PSG of Humanities Panel address the types of outputs that will be considered for the research output element of the RAE submission. They range very broadly, and they

apply equally to the research underpinning impact cases (see paragraph 39 of the Humanities PSG).

But it is important also to note paragraphs 35-37 of the GPG, which refer to the handling of non-traditional outputs, and especially the need to make explicit the claim to research novelty (more specifically, how the output meets the criteria of originality, significance and rigour). This also would apply to any non-traditional output submitted as underpinning impact cases. That is to say, in presenting the argument about why the submitted underpinning research meets the required 2\* standard, similar care should be taken with a non-traditional output as with a traditional one.

Q.8 Does that underpinning research output have to have been published in an academic journal? If not, any other examples of admissible forms of underpinning research outputs?

Response to Panel 11 Q.8: No. For examples of admissible forms see the sources given in the answer to Panel 11 Q.7 above.

Q.9 Can the underpinning research output be done by a researcher at some other university (provided that we, as the submitting university, significantly supported his/her research work and enabled the impact generated)?

Response to Panel 11 Q.9: The GN, paragraph 7.6, state that the *research* underpinning claimed impacts must be ‘undertaken at, or significantly supported by, the submitting university’, and that the research ‘must be within the scope of the relevant unit of assessment at the submitting university’. The *impact* must also have been ‘enabled or generated or substantially supported by the submitting university’ (GPG, paragraph 47, Criteria (a)).

Therefore the circumstance proposed in the question is allowable. It would, however, be essential to demonstrate very clearly, with potentially auditable evidence, how the submitting university ‘significantly supported’ research at another university, as well as meeting the other conditions referred to in the paragraph just above.

Q.10 In what ways can the submitting university demonstrate that the research underpinning the impact was significantly supported by the submitting university?

Response to Panel 11 Q.10: Presumably this question refers to the circumstances cited in Panel 11 Q.9. If so, ‘significant support’ would usually (though not necessarily exclusively) imply a financial, personnel or equipment/facilities contribution of a scale that could reasonably be regarded as significant with respect to the activity in question. A joint research project, in which the submitting university had a substantial stake, could be an example.

***Panel 12 – Creative Arts, Performing Arts & Design***

Q.1 In the Panel-specific Guidelines for the Creative Arts, Performing Arts & Design Panel,

*“Impact case studies should include appropriate evidence or indicators of the quality of underpinning research i.e. key indicators of how each fulfils the criteria for significance, originality and rigour.”*

Questions:

- a. What kind of information, evidence or indicators are expected to prove the quality of the underpinning research?
- b. Should the argument be written in the text of the Impact Case Study or provided as an attachment or weblink?

Response to Panel 12 Q.1: Please see the responses for Panel 11 Q.4 above.

Note: There were no questions addressing to other panels.

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UGC Secretariat  
Updated in March 2019