

# Summary of Comments and the UGC's Responses to the Draft General Panel Guidelines (GPG) and Template for Panel-Specific Guidelines on Assessment Criteria and Working Methods (PSG) for Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2026

## Preamble

The UGC consulted universities as well as the RAE Panel Convenors and Deputy Convenors on the draft GPG and template for the PSG in February to April 2024. We thank universities again for the thoughtful comments raised. UGC and its sub-committees have considered all the comments carefully at its meeting in May 2024. Our responses to some of the major concerns are summarised below.

In principle –

- (a) comments that would essentially necessitate a revision or a reversal of decisions already laid down in the Framework would not be considered;
- (b) the call for clarification of various other details of the guidelines would be accommodated by more explanation and/or examples, where applicable and necessary; and
- (c) panel-specific criteria to be covered in the PSG will not be separately addressed in this summary, and will be discussed by the panels at the July 2024 Open Forum.

## A. Summary of Comments and UGC's Responses on the Draft GPG

Subject	Relevant parts of draft GPG with paragraph numbers	Remarks
Panels and UoAs	4. There are 13 assessment panels for the expert review of submissions, covering 41 UoAs in the RAE 2026. RAE 2026 assessment panels will be expanded by about 10% with increased participation of local members while maintaining sufficient non-local members who have fewer conflicts of interest to ensure that each panel would have sufficient expertise and <del>workforce manpower</del> in completing the assessment in a fair and efficient manner. [...]	Textual refinements <span style="color: blue;">in blue</span> as suggested by some panels for adopting gender-neutral language.
	<u>Appendix F – Guidelines for Non-Local RAE Panel Members in Offering Comments for an International Comparison</u>  6. It will be useful if these comments could be couched in language that could be understood by lay <del>men</del> <span style="color: blue;">persons</span> .	

Submissions for Assessment	<p>12. (c) Environment (paragraphs 9.1-9.10 of the Guidance Notes refer)</p> <p>For each submission on research environment, universities are required to provide information and data as specified below –</p> <p>(i) [...] In addition, a tabular breakdown of a university's eligible academic staff in each UoA by rank and years of eligible appointment at the submitting university as well as the number of new researchers will be provided to the panels by UGC for background information.</p>	<p>One university enquires if the tabular breakdown as mentioned under GPG paragraph 12(c)(i) is to be submitted by universities separately or if they should be summary tables of aggregate data or individual staff data.</p> <p>Similar to RAE 2020, universities are required to submit a list of all eligible academic staff and other staff-related information for each UoA as per draft Guidance Note (GN) paragraph 4.2(a) and GPG paragraph 6 by 1 December 2025. In the data specifications for the RAE Electronic System, information such as eligible staff's UoAs, ranks, years of eligible appointment at the submitting university as well as the number of new researchers are all included in the submission. Staff data will be submitted at individual staff data level.</p>
	<p>12. (c) Environment (paragraphs 9.1-9.10 of the Guidance Notes refer)</p> <p>(ii) one UoA-level environment overview statement for each UoA describing the research and impact strategy(ies); research integrity, research ethics and research culture; support for research staff and students; research income, infrastructure and facilities; research collaborations, esteem and wider contributions to the discipline or research base, etc. of the administrative units containing the staff in the submitting unit of assessment during the assessment period, i.e. from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2025. [...]</p>	<p>One panel enquires if “impact” is supposed to be also covered in other components e.g. research staff, research infrastructure, research collaboration etc of the statement.</p> <p>In RAE 2026, impact overview statement has been incorporated into the new university-level environment statement. Amongst others, universities should comprehensively illustrate their impact strategy in the “research and impact strategy” part of the UoA-level environment</p>

		statement, including but not limited to their UoAs' current/future strategic aims, goals and/or evidence of achievements, etc. for impact. To avoid repetition, it is not recommended to request universities to cover "impact" in other parts of the environment overview statement.
	<p>12. (c) Environment</p> <p>(iii) 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 2019 to 30 September 2025.</p>	One university enquires if the data required is at UoA level or institutional level. As detailed in the prescribed form for "Environment Data" (Appendix H of the GN), the staff data required is at UoA level.
Basis of Evaluating Research Outputs	16. PhD dissertations, or proprietary research which does not result in output that is accessible to the public and the profession are <u>not</u> accepted as outputs for assessment. However, output items of exhibitions and demonstrations relating to proprietary research which: (a) are accessible to the public and the profession; (b) are non-traditional output for assessment; and (c) contain enough information for evaluation, may be submitted for assessment.	PhD dissertations are not accepted as outputs for assessment. Minor refinement <b>in blue</b> for clarity.
	<p>18. In respect of each output item, the following information should be provided as specified in paragraph 5.17 of the Guidance Notes–</p> <p>(a) for traditional outputs as referred to in paragraph 17 (a) above, universities are required, as specified in paragraph 5.17 (b) of the Guidance Notes, to provide the originally published or publicly made available abstract or table of content of the output in English and, if applicable, other <b>widely-used languages such as Chinese, Japanese, German, French, etc.</b><sup>6</sup>, depending on the respective output type. [...];</p> <p>(b) for non-traditional outputs, universities are required to provide additional information <b>up to 300 words</b> as specified in paragraph 5.17(d) of the Guidance Notes;</p>	<p>Refinements <b>in blue</b> for clarity.</p> <p>GN paragraph 5.17(b) has also been updated accordingly.</p>

	<i>(Footnote 6: The English version shall prevail if there is any inconsistency or ambiguity between the English version and the version in other languages.)</i>	
Assessment of Non-traditional Outputs	<p>35. In the case of research outputs in non-traditional form as described in paragraph 18 (b) above, the submitting university must provide additional information, <b>if applicable</b>, on (a) novelty of the work; (b) the deliverables; and (c) the dissemination method, <b>as specified in paragraph 19 of the Panel-specific Guidelines</b>. The description required for each non-traditional output item is limited to 300 words.</p>	<p>Refinements <b>in blue</b> considering non-traditional outputs may not be expected in certain panels, and non-traditional output deliverables can vary depending on the discipline, research goals and project requirements. Universities are reminded to make reference to panel-specific requirements in PSG in making submissions.</p>
Cross-Panel Referrals	<p>43. Cross-panel referral can be requested for (a) assessment by another panel or (b) collective assessment by two or more panels, which are required mainly for inter-disciplinary outputs</p> <p>(b) <u>Collective assessment by two or more panels</u></p> <p>For this category, assessment of the output, <b>in particular inter-disciplinary output</b>, is intended to be conducted <u>jointly</u> by the “original panel” and one or more “receiving panel(s)”. The “original panel” may request up to two other panels to jointly assess an output item. If such a request is accepted, the Panel Convenors of the “original panel” and “receiving panel(s)” will each assign <u>one</u> panel member<sup>9</sup> to conduct the assessment. Grading and comments given by the panel member(s) of the “receiving panel(s)” will be forwarded to the Panel Convenor of the “original panel”. Specific criteria and methods that the “receiving panel(s)” have used in the assessment will also be made available to the “original panel” for reference. The ultimate assessment methodology and the decision on the final grading of the item in question should rest and remain with the “original panel”.</p> <p><i>(Footnote 9: Including external reviewers, if applicable.)</i></p>	<p>Refinements <b>in blue</b> for clarity. Inter-disciplinary output will be handled by joint assessment by two or more panels.</p>

Basis of Evaluating Research Impact	<p>47. To be eligible for assessment in the RAE 2026, the impact must meet the definition and criteria as set out below –</p> <p><u>Definition</u></p> <p>(b) academic impact of research, i.e. the contribution that research brings to academic advances across and within disciplines, is valuable, but will be assessed through the outputs and/or environment elements in the exercise. As the impact element concerns impact beyond academia, the scope of impact as a distinct element –</p> <p>(i) excludes impacts on research or the advancement of academic knowledge within the higher education sector;</p> <p>(ii) excludes impacts on students, teaching or other activities within the submitting university; and</p> <p>(iii) includes other impacts on teaching or students, <b>but only</b> where they extend significantly beyond the submitting university or on other fields (e.g. impact of text mining technologies in linguistics or computer science research in the medical or commercial field), <b>in the context of paragraphs 47(b)(i) and (ii) above;</b></p>	<p>The Secretariat would like to reiterate that by “impact” we mean “societal impact”, which is “beyond academia”.</p> <p>Refinements <b>in blue</b> to clarify where impacts on teaching or students may be included.</p> <p>GN paragraph 7.4(c) has also been updated accordingly.</p>
	<p>47. <u>Criteria</u></p> <p>(c) while impact is not in any way meant to be a reflection of the quality of the initial research outputs, the quality of underpinning research should be equivalent to at least attaining 2 star (2*), i.e. of international standing. Panels will specify in their Panel-specific Guidelines the references that a submitting unit is required to provide as evidence of the quality of underpinning research. Based on the information submitted, the panel will use its expert judgement to determine in how much detail the panel needs to review the underpinning research in order to assure that the quality threshold has been met. Provided that the panel is satisfied that the quality threshold has been met, the quality of the underpinning research will not be taken into consideration as part of the assessment of the claimed impact. Panels will also specify their approach to evaluating the quality of underpinning research in their Panel-specific Guidelines.</p>	<p>One university enquires about how to determine the qualities of the underpinning research are equivalent to at least 2 star.</p> <p>According to GPG paragraphs 47(c) and 52, panels will specify in their PSG the references that a submitting unit is required to provide as evidence of the quality of underpinning research. Panels will consider the evidence of the quality of individual research underpinning the impact cases and where necessary will review the outputs concerned to ensure that the quality of the research is of at least 2 star</p>

		(2*), i.e. of international standing.
	<p>48. While impacts could be at different stages of development, the impacts to be assessed should occur in the assessment period. This may include, for example, impacts at an early stage, or impacts that may have been submitted in RAE 2020, started prior to 1 October 2019 but have new or expanding impact enabled during the assessment period from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2025. For the latter, i.e. <a href="#">continued</a> impact case studies, clear evidence of the manner and extent to which the development of the impact <a href="#">expands its scope goes distinctly</a> beyond that presented in the previously submitted impact case study in RAE 2020 should be provided.</p> <p><a href="#">Case studies will be considered to be continued<sup>10</sup> if both –</a></p> <p>(a) <a href="#">the body of underpinning research is the same as described in the RAE 2020 case study. This should not be understood solely in relation to the referenced outputs, but means that the continued case study does not describe any major and significant new research having taken place since the previous case study that has made a distinct and material contribution to the impact; and</a></p> <p>(b) <a href="#">broad overlap in the impact types and beneficiaries of what was submitted in RAE 2020 is shown, but now going distinctly beyond that, and possibly also expanding the range of impact types and/or beneficiaries.</a></p> <p><a href="#">For the purpose of RAE 2026, only those aspects of a continued impact case that expand its scope beyond previously submitted in RAE 2020 will be considered for scoring.</a></p> <p><a href="#">(Footnote 10: Otherwise, a case study will be considered new where major and significant additional underpinning research has taken place since that described in the previous case study, which has made a distinct and material contribution to the impact, and/or the impact types or beneficiaries have changed; or the impact types and beneficiaries of the cases submitted in RAE 2020 and RAE 2026 show no broad overlap.</a></p>	<p>Some universities enquires on the definition of “continued impact case study”. Elaboration <a href="#">in blue</a> for clarity.</p> <p>GN paragraphs 7.5 and 7.9 have also been updated accordingly.</p>

Impact Case Study(ies)	<p>51. In each impact case study, the submitting unit must include evidence appropriate to the types of impact that supports the claims. The submission of an impact case study should contain –</p> <p>(a) <u>summary of impact</u>: a brief summary of the impact, including who and what has benefitted, been influenced or acted upon;</p> <p>(b) <u>underpinning research</u>: descriptions of the knowledge, insights, methodologies, solutions and/or inventions brought about by research that underpinned the impact, an outline of the underpinning research, when it was undertaken and the key researchers concerned. For <b>continued</b> impact case studies as described in paragraph 7.5 of the Guidance Notes and paragraph 48 above, clear evidence of the manner and extent to which the development of the impact <b>expands its scope goes distinctly</b> beyond that presented in the previously submitted impact case study in RAE 2020 should be provided;</p> <p>(c) <u>references to the research</u>: references to key outputs from the underpinning research, including name of author(s), title of output, year and location of publication, and evidence of the quality of the research, as requested by respective panels in their Panel-specific Guidelines;</p> <p>(d) <u>details of the impact</u>: a detailed narrative explaining how the research led to or underpinned the impact, the beneficiaries and the nature of the impact, when the impact occurs/occurred, evidence (e.g. indicators) illustrating the extent of the impact, the relationship between the case study and how it has/had sustained further innovation and impact, and how the submitting unit made contributions to the impact in the assessment period from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2025; and</p> <p>(e) <u>sources to corroborate the impact</u>: sources external to the submitting university that could provide corroboration to support the statements and claims in the impact case study, and details on how the sources can be accessed for audit purposes.</p>	<p>One university enquires if non-English references/sources are admissible, and/or if translation is required.</p> <p>Universities should submit impact case studies by completing the prescribed form (Appendix F of the GN) in English. For the part on references/sources, non-English information will also be accepted as in RAE 2020. There are two ways for panels to deal with non-English references/sources –</p> <p>(1) Panels could require universities to provide translation for every non-English references/sources in accordance with draft PSG paragraph 33; or</p> <p>(2) If deemed necessary, panels could require further information after the submission deadline through the UGC Secretariat with the universities concerned according to draft GPG paragraph 14, but that would be optional.</p>
	<p>52. The focus of assessment is the impact achieved by the submitting unit, not the impact of individuals or individual research outputs, although they may</p>	<p>There are enquires about the purpose of the supplementary information, including</p>



	<p>contribute to the evidence of the submitting unit's impact. The assessment should solely be based on the four-page impact case studies, rather than the content and quality of other supplementary information, such as any video links that may be included in the case study submission, or any supplementary information as required by the Panels during the assessment in accordance with paragraph 14. Panels will consider the evidence of the quality of individual research underpinning the impact cases (with research being understood as broadly as defined in paragraphs 2-3 above) and where necessary will review the outputs concerned to ensure that the quality of the research is of at least 2 star (2*), i.e. of international standing. A case study will be regarded as not eligible and deemed as "unclassified" if the respective panel considers that the underpinning research outputs are not up to the required standard. Individual panels will specify the kinds of information and evidence expected in the impact submissions.</p>	<p>whether they were to be considered in scoring, and whether panel members are expected to refer to information via any link included within the 4-page document.</p> <p>As a general principle and matter of fairness, panels' assessment will be solely based on the four-page submissions made by the universities.</p> <p>To ensure that the assessment will be conducted fairly to all submissions, no additional information may be submitted by the staff members or universities unless it is requested via the UGC Secretariat. The additional information, if requested by the panel, can only serve as reference. The rating of the submission will be based on the four-page original submission.</p> <p>Any link included in the four-page submission is for reference purpose only and should not be taken into account when rating the submission.</p>
Grading Research Impacts	<p>54. Panels will assess the reach and significance of impacts on the economy, society, <b>environment</b> and/or culture that were underpinned by research conducted in, or significantly supported by, the submitting unit/university, as well as the submitting unit's approach to enabling impact from its research. In assessing the impact described within a case study, the panel will form an overall view about its reach and significance taken as a whole, rather than assessing reach and significance separately.</p>	<p>Refinements <b>in blue</b> to acknowledge impact on environment, climate change, carbon emission, etc.</p>



Handling of Assessment Results	71. Moreover, research output data (except for the <del>100-word-additional statements as specified in paragraph 18 above</del> required on (i) double-weighting; (ii) originality and significance; (iii) new insights or innovations presented in the outputs; (iv) contribution of the submitting authors and (v) non-traditional outputs), impact submissions and environment submissions (including university-level and UoA-level environment statements as well as environment data) will be published by unit of assessment and by university for public information after the release of RAE results.	<p>A few universities enquire about what kinds of submission data is to be released after results announcement.</p> <p>Refinements in blue to clarify that all the additional statements required on research output will not be published.</p>
General Comments		
Submissions for Assessment	12. [...] Universities are accountable for the substance and accuracy of their submissions they make to RAE 2026. The relevant panels will base their assessment on the substance and evidence presented in assessing the submissions. Besides, by making submissions to RAE 2026, universities undertake that the submissions concerned will be carefully monitored for their compliance with applicable laws, health and safety guidelines and ethical standards.	<p>One panel raises the issue of generative AI (i.e. systems like ChatGPT and other such systems that generate text, audio, images and video based on brief prompt inputs), and their validity in RAE 2026.</p> <p>In principle, as long as paragraph 5.9 of the GN was fulfilled, i.e. the outputs were published, publicly available or officially accepted for publication, the research output will be admissible to RAE 2026.</p> <p>Universities are reminded that they are accountable for the accuracy and substance of the submissions they make to RAE 2026, and relevant panels will base their assessment on the substance and evidence presented in assessing the submissions, regardless of whether tools were used for writing or editing assistance.</p> <p>Additions in blue have hence been made to paragraph 12 of the GPG.</p>

		Same additions have also been made to GN paragraphs 2.11 and 2.12.
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## B. Summary of Comments and UGC's Responses on the draft PSG template

Subject	Relevant parts of draft PSG template with paragraph numbers	Remarks				
Section B: Assessment Criteria: Research Outputs / Non-traditional Outputs	19. The Panel will handle research outputs in non-traditional form according to paragraphs [35-37] of the General Panel Guidelines. The Panel expects to receive additional information about each non-traditional output in terms of its novelty, significance, method used to ensure academic rigour in the production of the output, deliverables, and dissemination method. [...]	Textual refinements in blue as suggested by one university.				
Section C: Assessment Criteria: Research Impact  Range of Impacts	30. Universities are expected to submit their strongest impact cases and not to align submitted cases specifically with the particular types of impact listed, as an impact case may describe more than one type of impact, such as [a drug may generate health and economic impact, or an environmental study may increase both biodiversity and tourism.]  <u>Table A: Examples of Impact<sup>1</sup></u> <table><tr><td><u>Impacts on the economy</u> <i>where the beneficiaries may include industry and society</i></td><td><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gains in productivity have been realised as a result of research-led practices.</li><li>• A spin-out or new business has been created, established its viability, or generated revenue or profits.</li><li>• Development of new products or processes.</li></ul></td></tr><tr><td>[...]</td><td></td></tr></table> <i>(Footnote 1: Examples of impact case studies in RAE 2020 may be accessed online at &lt;<a href="https://impact.ugc.edu.hk/">https://impact.ugc.edu.hk/</a>&gt; and &lt;<a href="https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/activity/research/rae/2020/impactsubmissions.html">https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/activity/research/rae/2020/impactsubmissions.html</a>&gt;. Other examples of research impact as assessed in other jurisdictions may be accessible online such as &lt;<a href="https://results2021.ref.ac.uk/impact">https://results2021.ref.ac.uk/impact</a>&gt; from the United Kingdom.</i>	<u>Impacts on the economy</u> <i>where the beneficiaries may include industry and society</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gains in productivity have been realised as a result of research-led practices.</li><li>• A spin-out or new business has been created, established its viability, or generated revenue or profits.</li><li>• Development of new products or processes.</li></ul>	[...]		Textual refinements in blue as suggested by one university. panels may modify Table A as they see fit.
<u>Impacts on the economy</u> <i>where the beneficiaries may include industry and society</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gains in productivity have been realised as a result of research-led practices.</li><li>• A spin-out or new business has been created, established its viability, or generated revenue or profits.</li><li>• Development of new products or processes.</li></ul>					
[...]						

	<p><i>Universities may also refer to examples of impacts and indicators detailed in Annex A of &lt;<a href="https://2021.ref.ac.uk/media/1450/ref-2019_02-panel-criteria-and-working-methods.pdf">https://2021.ref.ac.uk/media/1450/ref-2019_02-panel-criteria-and-working-methods.pdf</a>&gt; of the United Kingdom Research Excellence Framework 2021.)</i></p>	
<p>Section D: Assessment Criteria: Research Environment / Environment Overview Statements</p>	<p>44. Within the terms of the Guidance Notes, the <b>[Biology]</b> Panel will expect in particular to see the following in the –</p> <p>44.1 <u>University-level Environment Overview Statement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• context and mission: [...]</li> <li>• research policy and strategy: [...]</li> <li>• people: [...]</li> <li>• research funding sources: [...]</li> </ul> <p>44.2 <u>UoA-level Environment Overview Statement</u></p> <p>In the context of the University policies as stipulated in the University-level Environment Overview Statement –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>UoA</u> context and structure: [...]</li> <li>• research and impact strategy: [...]</li> <li>• research integrity and research ethics: <b>[highlights of success and challenge with the UoA; mechanisms by which standards of research quality and integrity are maintained for example ethics procedures and authorship; ●●●.]</b></li> <li>• people: [evidence of staffing strategy, staff development and training (e.g. leave policies, equality and diversity agenda, measures for junior scholars, etc.) and evidence of their effectiveness; how individuals at the beginning of their research careers are being supported and integrated into the research culture of the submitting unit; information on postgraduate recruitment, training and support mechanisms; measures/facilities for development and supervision of research students; <del>mechanisms by which standards of research quality and integrity are maintained for example ethics procedures and authorship; ●●●.</del> ]</li> </ul>	<p>One university suggests to remove paragraph 44.1 in the PSG since this has already been covered in paragraph 59 of the GPG.</p> <p>For completeness of PSG paragraph 44 (regarding what is expected in the university-level and UoA-level environment statements), it is proposed to keep paragraph 44.1 on university-level environment statement. Panels have already been reminded in the “Note to Panel” that no change is expected in paragraph 44.1 unless absolutely necessary.</p> <p>Separately, the <b>blue text</b> “mechanisms by which standards of research quality and integrity are maintained for example ethics procedures and authorship” has been consolidated under the section of “research integrity and research ethics” to avoid duplication.</p> <p>The unit-of-assessment level environment overview statement in Appendix G of the GN has also been updated accordingly.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• income (e.g. grants received), infrastructure and facilities: [...]</li> <li>• collaborations: [...]</li> <li>• esteem: [...]</li> <li>• contribution to the discipline or research base: [...]</li> </ul>	
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