

**Research Assessment Exercise 2026**  
**Panel 8 – Law**  
**Panel-specific Guidelines on**  
**Assessment Criteria and Working Methods**  
(October 2024)

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**Introduction**

1. This document sets out the assessment criteria and working methods that the Law Panel of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2026 will apply. It should be read alongside the General Panel Guidelines of the Exercise. The provisions set out in this document serve as further elaboration and amplification of the assessment criteria and working methods as they will be applied by the Law Panel. In areas where no additional information has been provided, the provisions in the General Panel Guidelines will prevail and apply in the assessment process of the Panel. These guidelines do not replace or supersede the requirements for submissions that are set out in the Guidance Notes for RAE 2026.

2. This document describes the criteria and methods for assessing submissions in the Law Panel. It provides guidance on the type of information required in the submissions. It also provides a single, consistent set of criteria that will be applied by the Panel when undertaking the assessment having regard to any differences in the nature of disciplines of the respective unit of assessment (“UoA”) under purview. It also provides a common approach to the working methods applied within the Panel.

## **Section A: Submissions**

### **UoA under the Panel**

3. The Law Panel will assess universities' submissions from the following UoA –

<u>Code</u>	<u>UoA</u>
19	law

The UoA includes all doctrinal, theoretical, empirical, comparative, critical, historical or other studies of law and legal phenomena including criminology, and socio- legal studies. The Panel would also expect research on legal education to be submitted in this UoA.

4. *(Template paragraph deleted)*

### **Inter-disciplinary Research**

5. The Panel recognises that certain aspects of research are naturally inter-disciplinary or span the boundaries between individual UoAs, whether within the Panel or across panels. The Panel will adopt the arrangements for assessing inter-disciplinary submissions as set out in paragraphs 39-40 of the General Panel Guidelines.

6. *(Template paragraph deleted)*

### **Assignment of Eligible Academic Staff in Each UoA**

7. *(Template paragraph deleted)*

8. It is critical that research outputs be assessed by the most appropriate panel. If the Panel suspects any anomaly regarding universities' assignment of eligible academic staff (and therefore their outputs) to research area(s) and the UoA under its remit, it will follow the procedures for re-assignment of the eligible staff according to paragraphs 10-11 of the General Panel Guidelines. The Panel also recognises its responsibility to handle submissions arising from any re-assignment of eligible academic staff to the Panel.

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

### **Output Types**

9. The Law Panel will consider the eligibility of research outputs as described in paragraphs 15-17 of the General Panel Guidelines, paragraphs 5.7-5.13 and Appendix E of the Guidance Notes.

10. The Panel will assess the quality of each eligible output on its own merits and not in terms of its publication category, medium or language of publication. The Panel will examine each item in detail and will not assess outputs mechanistically according to the publication venue. The Panel recognises that there can be work of the highest quality in various output forms, and no distinction will be made between types of output submitted or whether the output has been made available electronically or in a physical form.

11. Forms of research outputs that are admissible and specifically relevant to the Law Panel include the following examples. This should not be regarded as an exhaustive list. Equally, there is no implication of priority or importance in the ordering of examples in this list –

- books and book chapters.
- journal articles.
- policy submissions and reports.

12. *(Template paragraph deleted)*

13. *(Template paragraph deleted)*

14. *(Template paragraph deleted)*

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

15. Paragraphs 29-31 of the General Panel Guidelines indicate that in exceptional cases a submitting university may request that outputs of extended scale and scope be double-weighted in the assessment. The basic criterion for double-weighting is that the output, in the judgment of the

Panel, should have required the research effort needed to produce at least two single outputs.

16. When requesting the double-weighting of an output, universities should submit a statement in not more than 100 words, explaining in what ways the output is of sufficiently extended scale and scope to justify the request.

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

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

18. *(Template paragraph deleted)*

### **Non-traditional Outputs**

19. The Panel will handle research outputs in non-traditional form according to paragraphs 35-37 of the General Panel Guidelines.

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

20. Panel members will use their professional judgement with reference to international standards in assessing research outputs.

21. In assessing outputs, the Panel will look for evidence of originality, significance and rigour, and will grade each output into one of the five categories of quality level as set out in paragraph 19 of the General Panel Guidelines. The generic description of the quality levels as set out in paragraph 20 of the General Panel Guidelines will be applied in the Panel's assessment.

22. The Law Panel provides the following amplifications of the criteria of assessing research outputs –

- originality: will be understood as the extent to which the output makes an important and innovative contribution to understanding and knowledge in the field. Research outputs that demonstrate originality may do one or more of the

following: produce and interpret new empirical findings or new material; propose a new paradigm shift; engage with new and/or complex problems; develop innovative research methods, methodologies and analytical techniques; show imaginative and creative scope; provide new arguments and/or new forms of expression, formal innovations, interpretations and/or insights; collect and engage with novel types of data; and/or advance theory or the analysis of law, policy or practice, and new forms of expression.

- significance: will be understood as the extent to which the work has influenced, or has the capacity to influence, knowledge and scholarly thought, or the development and understanding of policy and/or practice.
- rigour: will be understood as the extent to which the work demonstrates intellectual coherence and integrity, and adopts robust and appropriate concepts, analyses, sources, theories and/or methodologies.

23. *(Template paragraph deleted)*

### **Metrics/Citation Data**

24. Pursuant to paragraph 24 of the General Panel Guidelines, the Panel will not use metrics or citation data to inform the assessment of outputs.

25. *(Template paragraph deleted)*

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

26. Other than the information required on research outputs as specified in the Guidance Notes and paragraph 18(a) of the General Panel Guidelines, the Panel requires –

- (a) in relation to each co-authored output, a statement of no more than 100 words to inform the Panel's judgment on the submitting author's contribution to the output.

- (b) in relation to subsequent editions, a statement of no more than 100 words indicating significant differences between the submitted edition and the immediately previous edition.
- (c) in relation to outputs with substantial overlap, a statement of no more than 100 words indicating significant differences between the outputs.

## **Section C: Assessment Criteria: Research Impact**

### **Range of Impacts**

27. The Law Panel will accept submissions on research impacts that meet the generic definition and criteria as set out in paragraphs 47-49 of the General Panel Guidelines.

28. The Panel will assess the quality of all eligible impact submissions based on their merits on an equal footing with no consideration given to the differences among submitting universities/units in terms of staff size, resources and histories. The Panel recognises that impacts within its remit can be manifested in various ways and may occur in a wide range of spheres whether locally, regionally or internationally.

29. Examples are provided to illustrate the range of potential impacts from research across the Law Panel in List A. These examples are indicative only, and are not exhaustive or exclusive. Equally, there is no implication of priority or importance in the ordering of examples in the list.

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 or an unlisted impact.

### **List A: Examples of Impact**<sup>1</sup>

- Contributing to widening access to justice.

<sup>1</sup> Examples of impact case studies in RAE 2020 may be accessed online at <<https://impact.ugc.edu.hk/>> and <<https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/activity/research/rae/2020/impactsubmissions.html>>. Other

- Influencing the development or application of law by courts.
- Influencing the agenda, methods or substance of law reform.
- Informing or influencing practice, policy or law in relation to discrimination on grounds such as religion, gender, sexual preference, race, ethnicity, language and so on.
- Informing or influencing the law, policy or practice of environmental regulation, or management of natural resources or biodiversity.
- Helping professionals and organisations adapt to changing socio-economic, political and legal environments.
- Contributing to continuing personal and professional development.
- Preserving, conserving and presenting cultural heritage.
- Influencing the design and delivery of curriculum and syllabi in schools and other educational institutions where the impact extends significantly beyond the submitting university, for example through the widespread use of text books, primary sources or an IT resource in education.
- Contributing to a wider public understanding of law, legal processes and legal institutions.
- Informing or influencing the development of expert systems in areas such as law enforcement, legal compliance and so on.
- Influencing the methods, ideas or ethics of the legal profession.
- Providing expert advice to governments, regulators, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector locally or internationally, and thereby influencing law, policy or practice.
- Engaging with and mediating between NGOs and charities in Hong Kong or internationally to influence their activities.
- Contributing to widening public access to and participation in the political process.

## Impact Strategy

31. Universities are reminded to set out their impact strategy in the University-level and UoA-level Environment Overview Statements.

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examples of research impact as assessed in other jurisdictions may be accessible online such as <https://results2021.ref.ac.uk/impact> from the United Kingdom.

Universities may also refer to examples of impacts and indicators detailed in Annex A of [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) of the United Kingdom Research Excellence Framework 2021.

## Impact Case Study(ies)

32. In drafting case studies, submitting units should pay careful attention to paragraphs 7.7 (a) and (b), 7.9-7.10 and Appendix F of the Guidance Notes and also paragraph 51 of the General Panel Guidelines.

33. Each impact case study should include appropriate evidence and indicators that support the claims for the impact achieved, including who and what has/have benefitted, when the impact occurs/occurred, and the relationship between the case study and how it has/had sustained further innovation and impact. Individual case studies may draw on various evidence and indicators, which may take different forms depending on the type of impact.

34. Examples are provided in Table B to illustrate potential evidence or indicators that may be particularly relevant to the Law Panel. These examples are not intended to be exhaustive. Equally, there is no implication of priority or importance in the ordering of examples in the list.

Table B: Examples of Evidence or Indicators for Impact<sup>2</sup>

Quantitative indicators	Publication and sales figures, funding, generation of new products, number of participants.
Reviews or citations in users' documents	Citations and reviews in non-academic users' documents such as court judgments, counsel's written submissions to courts, policy documents, reports of law reform bodies, and civil-society reports.
Public engagement	Reactions to media coverage; downloads of linked resources, web access count; and the elaboration of the meaning and implication of such quantitative evidence.
Policy engagements	Influence on public policy debate and practice, formal partnership agreements.
Independent testimony	Acknowledgement in publications, testimony of experts or third parties.

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<sup>2</sup> See footnote 1.



Formal evaluations	Professional evaluation, formal peer review.
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35. The Panel provides the following advice on particular aspects of impact case studies –

- The impact should be clearly identified and distinguished from pathways to impact.
- The causal link between the impact and the underpinning research should be clear.
- Evidence supporting each impact case should be verifiable.

### **Underpinning Research**

36. The Panel acknowledges the level of quality required for research underpinning impact cases, i.e. equivalent to at least 2 star (2\*) or international standing, as stipulated in the General Panel Guidelines. The Panel may review the outputs concerned in order to ensure the quality of the underpinning research is at least 2 star (2\*).

37. Provided that the Panel is satisfied that the quality threshold has been met, the quality of the underpinning research will not be taken into account in the assessment of the quality of impact. The evaluation of the outputs concerned under the impact element is a separate assessment only for assuring the threshold of underpinning research. Underpinning research referenced in a case study may also be submitted for assessment under the research output element. In this case, the guidance on output types and criteria for assessing research outputs as stipulated in paragraphs 9-14, 20-23 above would apply.

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

38. Panels will exercise their expert judgement in assessing the quality of each impact submission, and will not judge in terms of the type of research underpinning the impact cases.

39. In assessing impacts, the Panel will look for evidence of reach and significance, and will grade each impact submission as a whole and give a rating using one or more of the five categories of quality level following

paragraphs 53-55 of the General Panel Guidelines. In respect of the Law Panel, the criteria of reach and significance will be understood as follows –

- reach: the extent and/or diversity of the beneficiaries of the impact, as relevant to the nature of the impact. Reach will be assessed in terms of the extent to which the potential constituencies, number or groups of beneficiaries have been reached. In other words, reach will not be assessed in purely geographic terms, or 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. The criteria will be applied wherever the impact occurred, regardless of geography or location, and whether in Hong Kong or elsewhere. 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.
- significance: the degree to which the impact has enriched, influenced, informed or changed laws, policies, opportunities, perspectives or practices of communities, individuals or organisations.

40. The Panel will make an overall judgement about the reach and significance of impacts, rather than assessing each criterion separately. The criteria will be applied in the assessment of the research impact regardless of the domain to which the impact relates. The quality standards for assessing research impact will be those indicated in paragraph 55 of the General Panel Guidelines.

## **Section D: Assessment Criteria: Research Environment**

### **Research Environment**

41. The Law Panel will accept submissions on research environment according to paragraphs 57-58 of the General Panel Guidelines. The Panel recognises that excellent research can be undertaken in a wide variety of research structures and environments and has no pre-formed view of the ideal size or organisational structure for a research environment. The Panel recognises the benefit of diversity within a research environment and will

regard positively efforts to achieve this as indicated in paragraph 66 of the General Panel Guidelines. The Panel will assess each submission based on what has been presented in relation to the work of the submitting unit in providing and ensuring a good environment.

42. *(Template paragraph deleted)*

### **Environment Overview Statements (One University-level Environment Overview Statement across the University and One UoA-level Environment Overview Statement for Each UoA)**

43. Following paragraphs 9.6 (a) and (b), 9.7, 9.8 and Appendix G of the Guidance Notes, and also paragraphs 59 & 60 of the General Panel Guidelines, the Panel will use the information provided in the University-level Environment Overview Statement to inform and contextualise their assessment of relevant sections of the UoA-level Environment Overview Statement.

44. Within the terms of the Guidance Notes, the Law Panel will expect in particular to see the following in the –

#### **44.1 University-level Environment Overview Statement**

- context and mission: an overview describing the submitting university's size, structure, mission and stage of development in view of its role statement so as to provide a context for the submission.
- research policy and strategy: describing the institutional strategy for research (including research strengths, research focus areas, distribution of research activities across research areas), enabling impact (including stakeholder engagement and knowledge transfer), developing a sustainable research culture (including open access and open data policies, approach to contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals, how inter-disciplinary and collaborative research has been supported, how research integrity and research ethics are embedded in the institution), and how the overall institutional policy and strategy contribute to government priorities.

- people: institutional staffing strategy, staff development and training (e.g. recruitment, leave policies, equality and diversity agenda, measures/facilities for early career researchers/research students, etc.), and development, training and supervision of research students.
- research funding sources: breakdown by funding source as a percentage total of overall funding; and university-level resources, infrastructure, and facilities available to support research and impact.

In the context of research environment, the university is encouraged to comment on the extent to which generative AI technologies have been addressed, applied or used within any of the above elements.

#### 44.2 UoA-level Environment Overview Statement

In the context of the university's policies as stipulated in the University-level Environment Overview Statement –

- UoA context and structure: a submission in this part is expected to briefly describe the organisation and structure of the unit, which research groups are covered in the submission and how research is structured across the submitting unit.
- research and impact strategy: evidence of the achievement of strategic aims for research and impact during the assessment period, details of current/future strategic aims and goals for research and impact; how these relate to the structure described above; and how they will be taken forward; methods for monitoring attainment of targets; new and developing initiatives not yet producing visible outcomes but of strategic importance; identification of priority developmental areas for the unit, including research topics, funding streams, postgraduate research activity, facilities, administration and management.
- research integrity and research ethics: give evidence of the steps taken to ensure that the research is undertaken in an ethical manner with rigour, honesty and care and respect for those involved in the process. Research conducted with

integrity leads to findings people can trust and have confidence in. Disciplinary best practice may consider, but is not limited to, issues ranging from approaches to training, ensuring dissemination and accessibility of results, data availability, registration of protocols, ethical compliance, authorship policies, reproducibility, open research, participatory research, the handling of conflicts of interest and intellectual property, and approaches to dealing with allegations of research misconduct and questionable research practices.

- people: evidence of staffing strategy, staff development and training (e.g. leave policies, equality and diversity agenda, measures for early career researchers, 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.
- income (e.g. grants received), infrastructure and facilities: information on research funding portfolio; evidence of successful generation of research income; major and prestigious grant awards made by external bodies on a competitive basis; provision and operation of research infrastructure and facilities, including special equipment, library, technical support, space and facilities for research groups and research students; information on joint-university or cross-institution shared or collaborative use of research infrastructure.
- collaborations: information on support for and exemplars of research collaborations; mechanisms to promote collaborative research at local and international level; support for inter-disciplinary research collaborations; research collaboration with research users.
- esteem: prestigious/competitive research fellowships held by individual researchers; external prizes and awards in recognition of research achievement.
- contribution to the discipline or research base: exemplars of leadership in the academic community such as advisory board

membership; participation in the peer-review process for grants committees or editorial boards.

In the context of research environment, the submitting UoA is encouraged to comment on the extent to which generative AI technologies have been addressed, applied or used within any of the above elements.

## Environment Data

45. Following paragraphs 9.6 (d) and (e), 9.9 and Appendix H of the Guidance Notes, and also paragraph 61 of the General Panel Guidelines, submitting units are required to provide environment data in conjunction with the UoA-level Environment Overview Statement.

46. *(Template paragraph deleted)*

## Criteria and Quality Levels for Assessing Research Environment

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

48. In assessing environment, the Panel will consider the research environment in terms of vitality and sustainability, including its contribution to the vitality and sustainability of the wider discipline or research base. The Panel will grade each environment submission as a whole with a profile rating using one or more of five categories of quality level as set out in paragraphs 63-65 of the General Panel Guidelines.

49. The Law Panel provides the following amplifications to supplement the generic criteria for assessing research environment –

- vitality: the extent to which a unit supports a thriving and inclusive research culture for all staff and research students, which is based on a clearly articulated strategy for research and enabling its impact, and is engaged with the local and international research and user communities.
- sustainability: the extent to which the research environment ensures the future health, diversity, wellbeing and wider

contribution of the unit and the discipline, including investment in people and in infrastructure, and its capacity to support and develop a vision for the future to nurture the research activities of the unit in the long run.

50. The Panel will make an overall judgement about the vitality and sustainability of research environments, rather than assessing each criterion separately.

## **Section E: Working Methods**

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

51. No sub-group or sub-panel will be formed within the Law Panel. The final assessment and grading will be decided by the Panel as a whole.

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

52. The Convenor, consulting the Deputy Convenor and other panel members, as appropriate, will allocate work to members and, if necessary, lay members, impact assessors and/or external reviewers in light of their expertise and workload. In allocating the work, the Convenor will also take into account any potential conflicts of interest of respective panel members and assessors. All panel members will take account of the requirements of the General Panel Guidelines to ensure that the exercise is conducted fairly and equitably.

53. Panel members will examine the submitted outputs in detail, and put forward a recommendation to the Panel for a collective decision on the final grading. To ensure fairness and consistency, each research output will be assessed in detail by at least two members, one of whom will normally be a non-local member. Final grading of research outputs will be decided by the Panel as a whole.

54. Subject to conflicts of interest of individual members, the impact and environment submissions will be assessed by members of the whole Panel and the final grading of individual submissions will be a collective decision of the Panel.

55. *(Template paragraph deleted)*

### **Cross-Panel Referrals**

56. This Panel will follow the procedures in paragraphs 41-43 of the General Panel Guidelines when initiating referrals to other panels and assessing submissions cross-referred by another panel.

57. *(Template paragraph deleted)*

58. *(Template paragraph deleted)*

### **External Advice**

59. This Panel will follow the procedure in paragraph 67 of the General Panel Guidelines when referral to external reviewers for expert advice becomes necessary for panel assessment.

### **Trial Assessment**

60. With reference to paragraphs 91-93 of the General Panel Guidelines, the Panel will conduct a trial assessment using a sample of submissions selected from universities' submissions. These sample submissions will be assessed by all members of the Panel. Members will share among themselves any important observations about the assessment to ensure fairness and consistency in the actual assessment. Submissions used for the trial assessment will be assessed afresh during the main assessment period without regard to their assessment results during the trial. The Panel will decide on the sample size after the submissions are received.

### **Panel Feedback Report**

61. With reference to paragraph 73 and Appendices E and F of the General Panel Guidelines, the Panel will provide feedback to the University Grants Committee (UGC) after the assessment process. Non-local panel members will be involved in offering comments to inform an impressionistic international comparison. The Convenor on behalf of the whole panel will submit the panel feedback report to the UGC by November 2026. Sector-wide comments in the panel feedback report will be released for public information after announcement of the RAE results. Comments on



individual universities will be provided to the respective universities under confidential cover in accordance with paragraph 11.3 of the Guidance Notes.