

### **Questions and Answers (Q&As)**

The following questions (Q) and answers (A) provide supplementary information concerning the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2026 in general as well as the submissions and assessment process of the exercise. These Q&As, as grouped by categories below, do not replace or supersede the Framework, Guidance Notes, General Panel Guidelines, and Panel-Specific Guidelines on Assessment Criteria and Working Methods (Panel-specific Guidelines) for the RAE 2026, which are promulgated and available on the University Grants Committee (UGC) website at <https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/activity/research/rae/rae2026.html>.

- (A) General
- (B) Eligibility of Academic Staff
- (C) Research Outputs
- (D) Research Impact
- (E) Research Environment
- (F) Operation and Process
- (G) Results
- (H) Others

In the event of a discrepancy between these Q&As and the four promulgated documents, the precedence in the four promulgated documents shall prevail, in the following order:

- i. Framework
- ii. Guidance Notes
- iii. General Panel Guidelines / Panel-specific Guidelines

### **(A) General**

1. Why is the RAE conducted?
2. Why spending resources to conduct another RAE in 2026?
3. What is the dimension of assessment in RAE 2026?
4. How is RAE 2026 different from the previous RAE 2020?
5. What is the assessment period and census date for RAE 2026?
6. When is the due date for universities to make submissions for RAE 2026?
7. Would a rating higher than 4 star (4\*) be considered to further push selectivity in RAE 2026?
8. Will the use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in producing the Impact and Environment submissions affect panel assessment?

### **(B) Eligibility of Academic Staff**

9. What are the staff eligibility criteria for making submissions of research outputs for RAE 2026?
10. Will all eligible academic staff of a university or just those who make submissions be counted in RAE 2026?
11. Could faculty who have served a substantial period of time during the assessment period but whose appointment does not cover the census date be considered in RAE 2026?
12. If the terms of appointment of an academic meet the staff eligibility criteria for RAE 2026, but he/she has taken prolonged paid or unpaid leave during the appointment, would his/her eligibility be affected?
13. If an academic staff member has taken or is taking unpaid leave during the assessment period, is he/she eligible for submitting research outputs for RAE 2026?

14. If an academic staff held a continuous full-time paid appointment of more than 36 months within staff grades “A” to “I” by 31 August 2023, but changed appointment to fractional basis from 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024 and is expected to resume the former full-time paid appointment within staff grades “A” to “I” after 31 August 2024, would this academic be eligible for RAE 2026?
15. How universities are to handle eligible academic staff who are on joint appointment by more than one unit/department of a university?
16. Universities’ assignment of eligible academic staff to a research area and respective units of assessment (UoAs) can be subject to re-assignment by the UGC in case of an anomaly. Would universities be allowed to give representation and appeal against the re-assignment?
17. Will eligible academic staff who are in practice-oriented disciplines or have been on leave for a prolonged period during the assessment period be exempted for inclusion in RAE 2026?
18. Why is there not a clear and straightforward policy in the granting of special consideration/exemption for eligible staff on maternity? It would be reasonable to allow automatic reduction of one output for anyone who has at least one birth during the assessment period.
19. How would you respond to the opinion that the RAE has driven academics to concentrate on research and less on teaching?
20. How do you respond to the observation of “game-playing” by universities, e.g. hiring “star professors” from overseas to boost the RAE performance? What has been/will be done by the UGC to deter/penalise such “game-playing” action?

### **(C) Research Outputs**

21. How many research outputs for each eligible staff should be submitted by the university? Are there any exemptions for eligible staff to submit fewer items?
22. If any eligible staff wants to submit more than four research outputs, would this be allowed?

23. Would those completed yet unpublished working papers be admissible as research output for assessment?
24. Would confidential reports (to which the sponsors (or government) have indicated sensitive issues) be included as research outputs for RAE 2026?
25. Can research outputs which are not yet published by the census date be accepted for submission for RAE 2026?
26. If a research output is an online-only or online-first publication and is yet to be formally published in print, is it regarded as a published output?
27. If an output was first published online and later in print, which publication date should be counted?
28. Would a paper (not yet published but unconditionally accepted) submitted in RAE 2020 and subsequently published within the assessment period of RAE 2026 be accepted for submission for RAE 2026?
29. If a research output was published before or during the assessment periods, could a revised or translated version of the output as second edition or second language publication be submitted for RAE 2026?
30. Would outputs that do not carry the submitting university's name be considered as eligible submission?
31. Will a brief summary highlighting the features of a research output be allowed in RAE 2026?
32. Under what circumstances will extra statement(s) on a research output be required, and what are the respective panel-specific criteria, if any?
33. Will the evaluation of a research output be based on the quality of the output alone, or will the contributions of the person who submits the output in the corresponding work be also considered? In the latter case, will there be any way for the person submitting the research output to describe his/her contributions?
34. Under what circumstances will a panel not be satisfied that a staff member has made significant contribution to the production of a co-authored output and grade the output as "unclassified"?

35. In case a panel is not persuaded that a significant contribution has been made by a staff member to a co-authored output, is there any opportunity for the staff member concerned to give justification or replace the submitted output by another output?
36. In certain disciplines like the computer science, prestigious conferences are major publication venues. For conference papers in some research areas, correspondence authorship is not clearly marked in the paper. How will it be handled when two authors both claim to be correspondence authors?
37. Will the number of citations be a measure considered by RAE panels, or will it be totally up to individual assessors to decide whether to consider it?
38. According to paragraph 6.10 of the Guidance Notes, research outputs will be captured and assessed in terms of academic strength and quality benchmarking against international standards; research outputs with social relevance should be submitted for evaluation under the element of research impact. If a research output with social relevance is submitted as the underpinning research of an impact case study for the impact element, will it be excluded from being evaluated under the element of research outputs?
39. If a research output is largely created by GenAI, will it be accepted and assessed by panels?
40. The use of GenAI and AI-assisted technologies in the preparation/production of a research output, to what extent, is acceptable in RAE 2026, or is it ruled out entirely?
41. For an inter-disciplinary research output, if there are any differing submission requirements from the concerned panels, which Panel-specific Guidelines shall be referred to for submission purpose?

#### **(D) Research Impact**

42. What is the submission requirement for research impact?
43. Would new departments in universities be allowed to submit fewer number of impact case studies?

44. Is it a must for research impacts be generated from the research outputs submitted for the RAE?
45. Could a university count the impacts generated by research undertaken by the university but picked up by users elsewhere e.g. a company in the industry in its submission, while the university was not involved in the transition of research method from the laboratory to the company?
46. Do all researchers (and the underpinning research) have to come from the same submitting UoA?
47. Could two submitting universities include the same staff member's work in their impact case studies even though the staff concerned is no longer affiliated with the universities and/or eligible for RAE 2026?
48. For impact case studies which involve inter-institutional collaborations, how will the impact cases be recognised and how to count the contribution?
49. Should multiple submission of one impact case study from different UoAs within the same university be accepted?
50. Is there any limit on the number of research projects or number of researchers involved in one impact case study?
51. If the impact case involved policy changes or professional practice, is it required that the number of people affected by the policy changes have to be estimated?
52. Could some sample case studies be provided to universities for reference?
53. Would Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities be considered as a kind of research impact?
54. Would future impact be counted?
55. Could UGC give a clearer definition on how an underpinning research would qualify as equivalent to at least 2 star (2\*)?
56. For 2 star (2\*) quality threshold of the underpinning research, does it imply all cited research, if more than one, should meet this requirement?

57. For the underpinning research referenced in each impact case study, would it be possible for universities to know about the number/amount of citations/peer-review funding received that corresponds to 2-star, i.e. international standing?
58. Paragraph 47 of the General Panel Guidelines states that the quality of the underpinning research of an impact case study will not be taken into consideration as part of the assessment for the impact. However, it is required that the quality of the underpinning research needs to meet the 2 star criterion threshold, or else the impact case study will be regarded as not eligible and deemed as unclassified. What is the rationale for this requirement?
59. How to distinguish between new impact case studies and continued impact case studies?
60. Is there any support from UGC to facilitate universities in getting evidence of impact from relevant government departments?

#### **(E) Research Environment**

61. What is the submission requirement for research environment?
62. How could central resources and infrastructure provided by universities to different departments/units or inter-disciplinary units be counted against individual UoAs in the university's submission?
63. Please clarify the differentiation of "Academic staff primarily undertaking work at degree or higher level" and "Academic staff not primarily undertaking work at degree or higher level", and how "Partially Funded by General Funds or Wholly Self-financed" is defined in part (A) of Environment Data.
64. Since the majority of research postgraduate (RPg) places are allocated to large scale universities, isn't it unfair to include data on "graduates of RPg programmes" in the assessment of research environment?
65. For the data on "Graduate of RPg Programmes", is there any distinction between graduates of full-time and part-time programmes?

66. If a full-time RPg student is funded by multiple funding sources including UGC and non-UGC funds, should a portion of the headcount be counted under UGC-funded programme while the remaining portion will be counted under non-UGC-funded programmes depending on the percentage of funding contribution?
67. If the Board of Graduate School confirmed the graduation status of a RPg student in October 2023 for the academic year of 2022/23, should the student be counted in the period of “1.9.2022 – 31.8.2023” or “1.9.2023 - 31.8.2024”?
68. Should the amount for "research grants/contract" to be reported in part (C)(i) of the Environment Data by source of funding refer to new funds received during the financial year, or the total on-going grants/contract in the year?
69. Is there any linkage between the Common Data Collection Format (CDCF) returns Table 63 with the environment data on research grants/contracts for RAE 2026?
70. Must the concerned staff of research grants/contracts be in the capacity of Principal investigator (PI) / Co-PI? Could research grants/contracts held by staff who are not eligible for RAE 2026 (e.g. retired staff) be counted?
71. As the environment data covers “research grants/contracts from sources outside Hong Kong which are under the control of the submitting university while funds may not necessarily be transferred to the university for use in Hong Kong”, what is the meaning of “control” and what to do if universities are unable to verify the grant amount and relevant information?
72. Would indirect/on-costs of research grants be included in the environment data on “research grants/contracts”? Would funding allocated for the Research Portion of UGC Block Grants be included under “research grants/contracts”?
73. Should universities report contract research and other consultancies under “research grants/contracts” of the Environment Data?

74. Regarding part (C)(ii) of Environment Data on “On-going Research Grants/Contracts: by Role of University”, please clarify whether aggregate % should be calculated on the basis of the number of projects (which varies in terms of size and scope) or in terms of grant amount.
75. Should unspent funds of research grants be excluded in the environment data on “research grants/contracts”?
76. For collaborative projects involving several institutions, should the submitting university report the whole grant income or the part of funding received?
77. Would it cause unfairness in assessment if different RAE panels use different weightings for individual aspects of research environment?
78. Would panels consider favorably environments where due consideration is given to gender equality and gender diversity?

## **(F) Operation and Process**

### **➤ Panels**

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

### **➤ Assessment Process**

83. How does the UGC ensure consistency of assessment standards within and across panels?

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

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

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

## **(G) Results**

92. In what form will the results of RAE 2026 be published?

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

#### **(H) Others**

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

96. How will the RAE 2026 results be used by the UGC to determine funding allocation to the eight UGC-funded universities?
97. How much funding will be informed by the RAE 2026 results, and when will this be determined?
98. Will UGC share the costs borne by universities in undertaking RAE 2026?

##### **➤ Release of RAE Information**

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

##### **➤ Trial Assessment**

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

## **(A) General**

### **1. Q: Why is the RAE conducted?**

A: The RAE is part of the University Grants Committee (UGC)'s commitment to promote world-class research and drive excellence in the UGC-funded universities through a comprehensive peer review on research quality of UGC-funded universities using international benchmark. The outcome of the RAE provides guidance for the universities' future developments in respect of pursuing research excellence. Further, the RAE results are used to inform the allocation of part of the Research Portion of the Block Grant to the UGC-funded universities.

### **2. Q: Why spending resources to conduct another RAE in 2026?**

A: Over the years, the outcome of the RAE has provided guidance for universities' developments in respect of pursuing research excellence. Universities welcome the comprehensive reports from the RAE panels, which serve to be valuable references on the performance of their research outputs, impact and environment in each of the participating UoA.

UGC Secretariat conducted a research on other nine jurisdictions<sup>1</sup> adopting similar peer-review research assessment mechanism in 2022-23. By far, none of those jurisdictions have plan to abolish the well-established peer-review research assessment mechanism. Alternative research assessment mechanism such as citation metrics can only inform one of the many aspects of research performance, but cannot reflect the performance of the universities in, say, research impact and research environment, as in RAE. Having consulted the universities, UGC/Research Group agreed in 2022 that the existing peer-review RAE remains the most confident and comprehensive representation of the research performance of the universities. With the support of universities, the UGC has started the planning of RAE 2026 since 2022.

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<sup>1</sup> Namely, the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Italy, South Africa, Poland, New Zealand, Ireland, Singapore and Japan.

3. **Q: What is the dimension of assessment in RAE 2026?**

A: RAE 2026 will assess research outputs, impact and environment, using international benchmarks to delineate universities' areas of relative strengths and give insights on areas and opportunities for development.

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

- (a) Research outputs – 65%
- (b) Impact – 20%
- (c) Environment – 15%

4. **Q: How is RAE 2026 different from the previous RAE 2020?**

A: While RAE 2026 will continue to use research outputs, research impact and research environment as the three elements of assessment, their respective weightings are adjusted from 70:15:15 in RAE 2020 to 65:20:15 in RAE 2026.

To reduce universities' burden in preparing for RAE 2026, and for simplicity, (i) the University's Research Strategy Statement is incorporated into the new University-level Environment Overview Statement, and (ii) Impact Overview Statement is combined with the existing UoA-level Environment Overview Statement. The two Environment Overview Statements (one at university level and the other at UoA level) will provide an overview of the university's context and mission, strategy for research and enabling impact, research culture, institutional-level resources and facilities available to support research and impact, etc.

Besides, in addition to impact submissions, research output data and environment submissions will be published by UoA and by university for public information.

Please refer to Guidance Notes paragraph 1.4 for more details.

5. **Q: What is the assessment period and census date for RAE 2026?**

A: The census date for reported data is 30 September 2025, and the assessment period is six years from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2025.

6. **Q: When is the due date for universities to make submissions for RAE 2026?**

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

- |                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| 31 July 2025     | - Request(s), if any, for special consideration/exemption for individual staff members. This is the final deadline of submission of exemption request. The UGC Secretariat will call for the exemption request in two batches commencing Q4/2024.  |
| 1 December 2025  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- A list of all eligible academic staff for each UoA.</li><li>- A list of full-time academic staff wholly funded by the university proper for degree or higher degree work within Staff Grades of “A” to “I” (as at the census date of 30 September 2025) who are not reported in the list of eligible academic staff.</li></ul> |
| 15 December 2025 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Full version of research outputs and information required on research outputs.</li><li>- Information required on research impact viz. impact case study(ies).</li><li>- Information required on research environment including University-level and UoA-level Environment Overview Statements and related data.</li></ul>      |

7. Q: **Would a rating higher than 4 star (4\*) be considered to further push selectivity in RAE 2026?**

A: No. Similar view and suggestion were noted and considered by the UGC and its sub-committees at their meetings in May 2023. By adopting the existing five-point scale, it enables continuity and comparativeness of the RAE 2026 results to previous RAEs. Therefore, no additional rating is considered for adding in RAE 2026.

8. Q: **Will the use of GenAI in producing the impact and environment submissions affect panel assessment?**

A: According to paragraph 2.11 of the Guidance Notes and as a general principle, 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.

Further information regarding the use of GenAI in research output is covered under Section (C) below.

## **(B) Eligibility of Academic Staff**

9. Q: **What are the staff eligibility criteria for making submissions of research outputs for RAE 2026?**

A: According to Section IV. of the Guidance Notes, a staff member must meet all the following criteria in order to be eligible for submitting research outputs for RAE 2026 –

(a) holding a full-time paid appointment at a UGC-funded university for a continuous period of at least 36 months covering the census date, i.e. 30 September 2025, provided that the employment start date was no later than 1 September 2023; and

(b) as of 1 September 2023, wholly funded by the university proper<sup>2</sup> for degree or higher degree work and are within staff grades of

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<sup>2</sup> Excluding schools/arms of the continuing education and professional training and other analogous organisations.

“Professor” to “Assistant Lecturer” as defined for the purpose of the CDCF.

10. Q: **Will all eligible academic staff of a university or just those who make submissions be counted in RAE 2026?**

A: All academic staff of a university who meet the eligibility criteria as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the Guidance Notes, regardless they make submissions or not, will be taken into account in the university’s results in RAE 2026. As in previous RAEs, RAE 2026 will be assessing the quality of research of the universities holistically on a UoA basis rather than evaluating each individual submitting staff member.

11. Q: **Could faculty who have served a substantial period of time during the assessment period but whose appointment does not cover the census date be considered in RAE 2026?**

A: The census date is an essential parameter in defining staff eligibility for RAE 2026. Faculty members whose appointments do not cover the census date would not meet the staff eligibility criteria. According to paragraphs 7.6, 9.5 and 9.9 of the Guidance Notes, non-eligible staff employed during the assessment period may be included in the impact submissions and be taken into account in the environment data of the respective universities’ environment submissions. In this regard, faculty members who do not hold appointments covering the census date are considered in RAE 2026.

12. Q: **If the terms of appointment of an academic meet the staff eligibility criteria for RAE 2026, but he/she has taken prolonged paid or unpaid leave during the appointment, would his/her eligibility be affected?**

A: An eligible academic staff for RAE 2026 should (a) hold a full-time paid appointment; (b) for a continuous period of at least 36 months covering the census date, i.e. 30 September 2025; (c) within staff grades “A” to “I” wholly funded by the university proper; and (d) the employment start date of whom was no later than 1 September 2023. If the academic in question takes paid or unpaid leave without actually starting the employment before 1 September 2023, or if his/her full-time paid appointment within staff grades “A” to “I” at a university does not make up a continuous period of at least 36 months due to the taking of unpaid leaves, the academic in question should not be regarded as eligible for RAE 2026 even though his/her initial employment terms meet the

requirements in the staff eligibility criteria.

13. Q: **If an academic staff member has taken or is taking unpaid leave during the assessment period, is he/she eligible for submitting research outputs for RAE 2026?**

A: According to paragraph 4.5 of the Guidance Notes, an academic staff member who meets all the eligibility criteria as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the Guidance Notes should be counted as an eligible academic staff regardless of any paid or unpaid leave he/she has taken during the assessment period. If the staff member concerned holds a full-time paid appointment of at least 36 months covering the census date and started the employment no later than 1 September 2023, and subject to meeting the other requirements as set out in the Guidance Notes, he/she would be regarded as an eligible staff member irrespective of any paid or unpaid leave taken during the assessment period.

14. Q: **If an academic staff held a continuous full-time paid appointment of more than 36 months within staff grades “A” to “I” by 31 August 2023, but changed appointment to fractional basis from 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024 and is expected to resume the former full-time paid appointment within staff grades “A” to “I” after 31 August 2024, would this academic be eligible for RAE 2026?**

A: No. As the staff member in question was not in continuous full-time employment for at least 36 months from 1 September 2023, he/she does not meet the staff eligibility criteria as stipulated in paragraph 4.1 of the Guidance Notes and is not an eligible staff for submitting research outputs for RAE 2026.

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

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

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

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

17. Q: **Will eligible academic staff who are in practice-oriented disciplines or have been on leave for a prolonged period during the assessment period be exempted for inclusion in RAE 2026?**

A: All academic staff who meet the eligibility criteria in Section IV of the Guidance Notes should be taken into account in RAE 2026. There is no exemption arrangement for particular groups of staff under RAE 2026.

While the special consideration/exemption in RAE 2020 to eligible academic staff who have been absent for a prolonged period, including those on leave for health, parental or other compassionate reasons, on a case by case basis will continue, universities may also submit cases with strong justifications if individual academic staff's research output has been significantly disrupted (e.g. due to the coronavirus pandemic, such as where travel restrictions impeded the type of fieldwork critical to work in that discipline) for UGC's consideration on an exceptional basis.

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

A: Similar view and suggestion were noted and considered by the UGC and its sub-committees in previous RAEs. Regarding the proposed automatic reduction of one output for staff on maternity grounds, there is a practical need for universities to provide information and documentary proof in order to identify and process for such cases. While individual staff cases may involve maternity and/or other

concurrent circumstances or complications, providing automatic reduction on maternity ground may open up questions on gender equality and similar arguments on other grounds. On balance, the UGC and its sub-committees affirmed to maintain the provisions in Guidance Notes, i.e. universities may request for special consideration/exemption for individual staff members on a case by case basis.

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

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

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

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

That said, the UGC has put in place measures with a view to addressing any (potential) occurrence of recruiting staff solely for the purpose of making submissions since RAE 2020. Similar to RAE 2020, the finalised Framework of RAE 2026 sets the commencement date of employment in the staff eligibility criteria at “1 September 2023”, following an agreement with the Heads of Universities.

## **(C) Research Outputs**

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

A: The university will submit a maximum of four research outputs for each eligible staff. A university is free to decide, in consultation with the staff concerned, not to make a submission or submit fewer than four outputs,

and no adverse record should or will be attached to any individual in respect of whom such a decision is taken. Any missing outputs will be deemed as “unclassified” in RAE 2026.

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

**22. Q: If any eligible staff wants to submit more than four research outputs, would this be allowed?**

A: No. Four research outputs per eligible staff is considered appropriate and have been adopted since RAE 2014, to form a robust assessment while maintaining the balance and representativeness of universities’ submission for the assessment. Furthermore, this allows RAE to uphold the intention to measure the research quality of universities rather than the individuals, and to avoid system gaming.

**23. Q: Would those completed yet unpublished working papers be admissible as research output for assessment?**

A: Yes, if the essential criterion in the RAE that research outputs must be publicly accessible or effectively shared in the profession is met. As in previous RAEs, RAE 2026 accepts research output that “is not yet published but officially accepted for publication” provided that it meets the criteria for the definition of research outputs in paragraph 5.7 of the Guidance Notes, viz.

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

RAE 2026 also recognises that there may be non-traditional outputs that are “not in published form” but “effectively shared in the profession” in the assessment period which spans six years. Panels have specified what

is admissible in paragraph(s) 11 (and 12) of the Panel-specific Guidelines. Universities are strongly advised to refer to the guidelines before making submission.

24. Q: **Would confidential reports (to which the sponsors (or government) have indicated sensitive issues) be included as research outputs for RAE 2026?**

A: The definition of research output for RAE 2026 requires that the output must be publicly accessible or effectively shared in the profession. Paragraph 5.10 of the Guidance Notes provides that proprietary research that does not result in output that is accessible to the public and the profession is not accepted as an output for assessment. In this regard, confidential reports involving sensitive information entrusted in confidence or in secret are not covered. If such confidential reports become public (i.e. unclassified from being confidential), they may be submitted so long as they meet the definition and criteria for research outputs.

25. Q: **Can research outputs which are not yet published by the census date be accepted for submission for RAE 2026?**

A: Yes. Provided that a research output meets all of criteria at paragraph 5.7 of Guidance Notes, it can be considered to fall within acceptable research outputs if it is not yet published, but officially accepted for publication (without any prior condition for its publication) within the assessment period, i.e. 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2025 and supported by a letter of acceptance, in accordance with paragraph 5.9(ii) of the Guidance Notes.

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

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

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

A: In accordance with paragraph 5.3 of the Guidance Notes, in case of an

individual output bearing multiple publication dates, the date on which it is firstly published or made publicly available, be it online or printed, should be counted. If an output was published or made publicly available online prior to printed publication, the online publication date should be counted. In making submissions for such outputs, universities should ensure the online publication dates were within the assessment period from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2025.

28. Q: **Would a paper (not yet published but unconditionally accepted) submitted in RAE 2020 and subsequently published within the assessment period of RAE 2026 be accepted for submission for RAE 2026?**

A: No. RAE 2026 will assess universities' submissions of research outputs during the period from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2025. Research outputs include publications that (i) was published; (ii) made publicly available in other form within the assessment period; or (iii) not yet published, but officially accepted for publication. If an output was officially accepted for publication (even if it was not yet published) and was made publicly available before the above-mentioned assessment period, it will not be accepted for assessment in RAE 2026.

29. Q: **If a research output was published before or during the assessment periods, could a revised or translated version of the output as second edition or second language publication be submitted for RAE 2026?**

A: If an eligible staff member already published his/her research output before the assessment period for RAE 2026, i.e. before 1 October 2019, a revised edition or translated version of this output, as a derivative work of the staff member's previously published output, would not be regarded as an output produced during the assessment periods unless it meets the criteria at paragraph 5.7 of the Guidance Notes for RAE 2026, viz.

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

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

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

31. Q: **Will a brief summary highlighting the features of a research output be allowed in RAE 2026?**

A: According to the Guidance Notes, abstract of research outputs in English (or if preferred, in other widely-used languages such as Chinese, Japanese, German, French, etc. on the understanding that the English version shall prevail) will be required as a means to provide summary information about the research outputs, whereas submission of supplementary information (up to 300 words) will apply to non-traditional research outputs.

In view of the burden on university staff in preparing the additional information as well as the variations in the quality of writing in the additional information that may distract/dilute the assessment of the outputs themselves, there is no general provision on the submission of a brief summary for each output. Where an individual panel considers it necessary, a brief statement of no more than 100 words for each output item to specify the originality and significance of the output will be required as stipulated in the respective Panel-specific Guidelines. Please refer to details in answer 32(d) in the next question.

32. Q: **Under what circumstances will extra statement(s) on a research output be required, and what are the respective panel-specific criteria, if any?**

A: Information required for submission on research output are set out in paragraph 5.17 of the Guidance Notes, paragraph 18 of the General Panel Guidelines and Panel-specific Guidelines where applicable. Universities are required to provide the following extra statements on a research output –

### Information to be provided to all panels

- (a) According to paragraph 5.17(b) of the Guidance Notes, keywords and an abstract should be provided for each research output. It is further elaborated in paragraph 18(a) of the General Panel Guidelines that if the originally published or publicly made available abstract does not indicate what new insights or innovation are present in the output, a statement up to 100 words is required to provide such information.

### Information to be provided to some panels

- (b) A statement up to 100 words is required by some panels for double-weighting request as stipulated in paragraph 5.17(c) of the Guidance Notes, paragraph 29 of the General Panel Guidelines and paragraphs 15 to 16 of the respective Panel-specific Guidelines –

Bio	HS	PS	EEE	CS/ IT	Engr	Built Env	Law	B&E	SS	Hum	CAPAD	Edu
N/A*	Yes	Yes	N/A*	N/A*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

\*The panel does not expect to receive any items proposed for double-weighting.

- (c) A statement up to 300 words is required by some panels for non-traditional outputs as stipulated in paragraph 5.17(d) of the Guidance Notes, paragraph 18(b) of the General Panel Guidelines and paragraph 19 of the respective Panel-specific Guidelines –

Bio	HS	PS	EEE	CS/ IT	Engr	Built Env	Law	B&E	SS	Hum	CAPAD	Edu
N/A*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

\*The panel does not expect to receive any forms of non-traditional output.

- (d) A statement up to 100 words is required by some panels for identifying overlapping content between research outputs, and/or specifying the originality and significance of the output, as stipulated in paragraph 5.17(e) of the Guidance Notes, paragraph 18(c) of the General Panel Guidelines and the below specified paragraph(s) of the respective Panel-specific Guidelines –

Bio	HS	PS	EEE	CS/ IT	Engr	Built Env	Law	B&E	SS	Hum	CAPAD	Edu
N/A	N/A	N/A	Yes*	N/A	Yes*	N/A	Yes#	N/A	N/A	Yes^	Yes+	Yes^

For the relevant panels, universities are required to provide a brief statement of no more than 100 words for each output item to specify the originality and significance of the output, e.g. the amount and nature of overlaps between research outputs, the relationship between different outputs on the research questions, the new elements in a new version of a research output submitted in any previous RAE, etc.

Please refer to the respective paragraph(s) of Panel-specific Guidelines for details of requirement and expectation set by the panels –

\*paragraph 14 for Electrical & Electronic Engineering and Engineering Panels

#paragraph 26 for Law Panel

^paragraphs 12 and 14 for Humanities and Education Panels

+paragraphs 12.2, 13.1, 13.3 and 14 for Creative Arts, Performing Arts & Design Panel

- (e) A statement up to 100 words is required by some panels for co-authored output as stipulated in paragraph 18 of respective Panel-specific Guidelines (and paragraph 26 for the Law Panel), with the co-author number threshold as summarised below –

Bio	HS	PS	EEE	CS/ IT	Engr	Built Env	Law	B&E	SS	Hum	CAPAD	Edu
≥ 8	> 15	≥ 15	> 10	> 6	> 6	≥ 8	≥ 2	N/A*	> 6	N/A*	≥ 4	> 5

\*The panel expects all named co-authors to have made a significant contribution to the research process leading to the output concerned.

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

A: According to paragraphs 6.1 and 6.7 of the Guidance Notes, research outputs will be assessed in terms of their originality, significance and rigour with reference to international standards. The quality of each output will be judged on its own merits. The contribution of submitting authors is a consideration in the assessment of co-authored outputs. As stated in paragraph 34 of the General Panel Guidelines, panels will

consider co-authorship to be a normal element of research activity in the field and expect all named co-authors to have made a significant contribution to the research process leading to the output concerned. RAE panels have provided further guidance on co-authored research outputs in their Panel-specific Guidelines. They have stated in the Panel-specific Guidelines if any information is required to support the inclusion of co-authored outputs applicable to the panels.

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

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

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

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

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

A: As suggested in the General Panel Guidelines, panels will consider co-authorship to be a normal element of research activity in the field and expect all named co-authors to have made a significant contribution to the research process leading to the output concerned. Panels have

specified their position on co-authored research outputs, and may require information (e.g. role and contribution of individual staff member of the submitting university to a co-authored output) to support the inclusion of co-authored outputs.

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

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

A: According to paragraphs 5.17(f) of the Guidance Notes, whether metrics/citation data are to be used to inform the peer review process will be decided by each of the RAE panels. If a panel wishes to use metrics to inform its decision, it will advise universities in paragraphs 24 and 25 of the respective Panel-specific Guidelines. Otherwise, no metric/citation data should be included in the submission. As stipulated in paragraph 24 of the General Panel Guidelines, while such metrics and data may serve as advisory or secondary information for reference, they will not be used in any algorithmic or deterministic way for the evaluation of research quality.

38. Q: **According to paragraph 6.10 of the Guidance Notes, research outputs will be captured and assessed in terms of academic strength and quality benchmarking against international standards; research outputs with social relevance should be submitted for evaluation under the element of research impact. If a research output with social relevance is submitted as the underpinning research of an impact case study for the impact element, will it be excluded from being evaluated under the element of research outputs?**

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

met. Once the 2 star quality threshold of underpinning research is established, the assessment of the quality of the impact claimed should be independent and separate from the quality of the underpinning research.

**39. Q: If a research output is largely created by GenAI, will it be accepted and assessed by panels?**

**A:** No. As stipulated in paragraph 16.2 of General Panel Guidelines, in respect of research outputs, and especially the assessment criterion of “originality”, there has to be complete clarity over the overarching creative role of identifiable human academic staff. Research outputs where the claim to originality depends largely upon GenAI will not be accepted, considering there is limited or no element of originality contributed by the submitting staff as the author/co-author, in addition to potential integrity and accountability issues.

It is noted that similar approach has been adopted by some reputable publisher(s)/publication committee in handling the matter of GenAI<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Examples of how publisher(s)/publication committee handle the matter of generative AI are extracted below for reference:

- Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (<https://publicationethics.org/cope-position-statements/ai-author>) — “AI tools cannot meet the requirements for authorship as they cannot take responsibility for the submitted work. As non-legal entities, they cannot assert the presence or absence of conflicts of interest nor manage copyright and license agreements. Authors who use AI tools in the writing of a manuscript, production of images or graphical elements of the paper, or in the collection and analysis of data, must be transparent in disclosing in the Materials and Methods (or similar section) of the paper how the AI tool was used and which tool was used. Authors are fully responsible for the content of their manuscript, even those parts produced by an AI tool, and are thus liable for any breach of publication ethics.”
- Journal of Geometry (<https://link.springer.com/journal/22/submission-guidelines>) — “Large Language Models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT, do not currently satisfy our authorship criteria. Notably an attribution of authorship carries with it accountability for the work, which cannot be effectively applied to LLMs. Use of an LLM should be properly documented in the Methods section (and if a Methods section is not available, in a suitable alternative part) of the manuscript. The use of an LLM (or other AI-tool) for “AI assisted copy editing” purposes does not need to be declared. In this context, we define the term “AI assisted copy editing” as AI-assisted improvements to human-generated texts for readability and style, and to ensure that the texts are free of errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and tone. These AI-assisted improvements may include wording and formatting changes to the texts, but do not include generative editorial work and autonomous content creation. In all cases, there must be human accountability for the final version of the text and agreement from the authors that the edits reflect their original work.”
- Wiley (<https://authorservices.wiley.com/ethics-guidelines/index.html>) — “Generative Artificial Intelligence tools (GenAI)—such as ChatGPT and others based on LLMs—cannot be considered capable of initiating an original piece of research without direction by humans. Tools cannot be accountable for a published work or for research design, which is a generally held requirement of authorship (as discussed in the Authorship section in these guidelines), nor does it have legal standing or the ability to hold or assign copyright. Therefore—in accordance with COPE’s position statement on Authorship and AI tools—these tools cannot fulfil the role of, nor be listed as, an author of an article.”

40. Q: The use of GenAI and AI-assisted technologies in the preparation/production of a research output, to what extent, is acceptable in RAE 2026, or is it ruled out entirely?

A: As stipulated in paragraphs 16.1 and 16.2 of General Panel Guidelines and with reference to the consensus in academia on the handling of AI produced research output, the use of GenAI models in the context of research work is not ruled out. Universities will be aware that several major publishers have already issued guidance<sup>4</sup> on their expectations over authorship. Likewise, panels would expect to be informed of the use of GenAI in submissions. Research outputs of all types that involve GenAI's contribution to originality and/or generation and design of research content, regardless of the extent, should be declared through the electronic system for RAE 2026 for the AI tool(s) that has(ve) been used and the reason(s) for using such tool(s). Failure to declare the involvement of GenAI in a submitted output may render the output be deemed as "unclassified".

If necessary, the UGC Secretariat will deploy AI detection tool(s) to analyse the level of involvement of GenAI in a submitted output and provide reports to the panels as reference. Where GenAI involvement is deemed to be exceptionally high by panels, panels will exercise holistic judgement and mark the research output as "unclassified" where appropriate. In reaching any such judgement, panels will use their subject-specific experience regarding the acceptable use of GenAI in their academic discipline. The UGC Secretariat may also acquire

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<sup>4</sup> References:

- ACM – ACM Policy on Authorship (April 20, 2023): <https://www.acm.org/publications/policies/new-acm-policy-on-authorship>
- Brill – Position Statement on Author/Editor Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) & Large Language Models (LLMs): <https://brill.com/page/461666>
- De Gruyter – Publishing Ethics: <https://www.degruyter.com/publishing/for-authors/for-journal-authors/publishing-ethics>
- Elsevier – The use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in writing (August 2023): <https://www.elsevier.com/about/policies-and-standards/the-use-of-generative-ai-and-ai-assisted-technologies-in-writing-for-elsevier>
- IEEE – Submission and Peer Review Policies, Guidelines for Artificial Intelligence (AI)-Generated Text: <https://journals.ieeeauthorcenter.ieee.org/become-an-ieee-journal-author/publishing-ethics/guidelines-and-policies/submission-and-peer-review-policies/#ai-generated-text>
- Springer – Artificial Intelligence (AI): [https://www.springer.com/gp/editorial-policies/artificial-intelligence--ai-/25428500?srsId=AfmBOorVYsNzoPHM5rWpaB-avjy1ooHN76gmSU8bmKEBj3Y\\_NuvF1zph](https://www.springer.com/gp/editorial-policies/artificial-intelligence--ai-/25428500?srsId=AfmBOorVYsNzoPHM5rWpaB-avjy1ooHN76gmSU8bmKEBj3Y_NuvF1zph)
- Taylor & Francis – AI Policy: <https://taylorandfrancis.com/our-policies/ai-policy/>
- Wiley – Generative Artificial Intelligence Guidelines for Authors (September 2023): [https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/pb-assets/assets/15405885/Generative%20AI%20Policy\\_September%202023-1695231878293.pdf](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/pb-assets/assets/15405885/Generative%20AI%20Policy_September%202023-1695231878293.pdf)

additional information from universities according to paragraph 5.18 of the Guidance Notes, in order to further assess the extent of GenAI usage in the submitted outputs.

**41. Q: For inter-disciplinary research outputs, if there are any differing submission requirements from the concerned panels, which Panel specific Guidelines shall refer to for submission purpose?**

A: In the event of differing requirements in case of inter-disciplinary research outputs, the maximum permissible limit of the respective Panel-specific Guidelines would apply.

## **(D) Research Impact**

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

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

Impact case study(ies) describing specific examples of impacts achieved during the assessment period by the submitting university, underpinned by research, research activity or a body of work derived from research (as equivalent to at least 2 star (2\*) quality), undertaken at, or significantly supported by, the submitting university in the period from 1 January 2006 to 30 September 2025, with prescribed quantity and page limit as stipulated below –

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

In case of nil submission or submission below the requirement, the

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

University’s impact strategy is covered in the Environment Overview Statements and will be referenced by the panels in evaluating the impact case studies.

43. Q: **Would new departments in universities be allowed to submit fewer number of impact case studies?**

A: RAE submissions and assessments are both on UoA basis, which is not necessarily nor intended to be equivalent to the grouping of disciplines under universities’ academic departments. The number of case study(ies) required for submission under each UoA is dependent to the assignment of eligible academic staff to the UoA by universities, regardless of the stage of development of the departments.

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

A: No. Research impacts for RAE 2026 must be achieved during the assessment period, i.e. 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2025, by the submitting university, underpinned by research, research activity or a body of work derived from research (with quality as equivalent to at least attaining 2 star (2\*), i.e. of international standing), undertaken at, or significantly supported by, the submitting university within the period from 1 January 2006 to 30 September 2025.

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

A: For the purpose of RAE 2026, impact must be enabled, generated or substantially supported by the submitting university during the assessment period, 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2025, underpinned by research undertaken at, or significantly supported by, the submitting university during 1 January 2006 to 30 September 2025. The submitting unit/university is to present how it made a distinct and material contribution to the impact in the assessment period such that the impact

would not have occurred or would have been significantly reduced without the contribution of research.

46. Q: **Do all researchers (and the underpinning research) have to come from the same submitting UoA?**

A: No. The period of underpinning research spans about 20 years. Academic departments or research units within a university may undergo internal restructuring or renaming. The Guidance Notes state that the impact case study(ies) should be the strongest example(s) selected to present the impacts that are generated or substantially supported by the submitting unit, and the impacts must be underpinned by research undertaken at, or significantly supported by, the submitting university.

47. Q: **Could two submitting universities include the same staff member's work in their impact case studies even though the staff concerned is no longer affiliated with the universities and/or eligible for RAE 2026?**

A: Yes. As set out in paragraph 7.6 of the Guidance Notes, impacts underpinned by research of non-eligible academic staff (e.g. part-time researchers and staff appointed after 1 September 2023) may be selected by universities in the submission. It does not matter if the researchers concerned are not eligible academic staff of the submitting university or no longer employed by the university. In principle, two universities may include an academic's work in their impact case studies. That said, each of the submitting universities needs to illustrate that the impacts are generated or substantially supported by the submitting unit, and underpinned by research undertaken at, or significantly supported by, the submitting university.

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

A: With reference to paragraphs 7.6 and 7.8 of the Guidance Notes, impact case study(ies) submitted by each unit of a university should be the strongest example(s) selected to present the impacts that are generated or substantially supported by the unit. Where an impact involves collaborations of multiple submitting units/universities within the same or across different UoAs, each of the submitting units/universities may submit a case study of the impact so long as it has made a distinct and

material contribution to the impact taking/taken place.

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

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

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

A: No. For the assessment of the impact element, the focus is the impact achieved by the submitting unit, not the impact of individuals or individual research outputs, although they may contribute to the evidence of the submitting unit's impact. As set out in paragraph 7.9 and Appendix F of the Guidance Notes, each impact case study should contain descriptions of the underpinning research including information on "the key researchers concerned" and "references to key outputs" with an indicative maximum of six references. There is no further specification on the limit or number of research projects or researchers involved in the case study.

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

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

52. Q: **Could some sample case studies be provided to universities for reference?**
- A: As mentioned in the Guidance Notes for RAE 2026, examples of impact submissions and 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>.
53. Q: **Would CPD activities be considered as a kind of research impact?**
- A: In presenting the evidence for impact, the submitting unit must distinguish activity (or pathway to impact) from the resulting impact itself. CPD activity itself, similar to other forms of knowledge dissemination activities (e.g. conferences and programmes for targeted groups, etc.) will not be considered as research impact as those are perceived as pathway to impact. Please refer to the Panel-specific Guidelines where the panels have illustrated the range of potential impacts from research and the examples of evidence.
54. Q: **Would future impact be counted?**
- A: No. In accordance with paragraph 7.1 of the Guidance Notes and paragraph 47(d) under the section “Criteria” of General Panel Guidelines, the impacts must have been enabled by the submitting university and evidenced during the assessment period from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2025. Future impact shall not be counted.
55. Q: **Could UGC give a clearer definition on how an underpinning research would qualify as equivalent to at least 2 star (2\*)?**
- A: It has been stated in the Framework and the Guidance Notes that the quality level of 2 star for underpinning research is equivalent to attaining “international standing”.
56. Q: **For 2 star (2\*) quality threshold of the underpinning research, does it imply all cited research, if more than one, should meet this requirement?**
- A: While paragraph 7.6 of Guidance Note and paragraph 47(c) under the section “Criteria” of General Panel Guidelines have outlined the requirement of the quality threshold of the underpinning research,

panels will make a holistic assessment of the totality of the underpinning research, i.e. if the overall quality of the underpinning research is equivalent to at least 2 star (2\*), in the light of the relevant academic practice, and evaluate the impact case studies based on the criteria set out in paragraphs 53 to 56 of the General Panel Guidelines.

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

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

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

A: The quality of the underpinning research as equivalent to at least 2 star is a threshold condition for the assessment of the corresponding impact case study. This is separate from the assessment of the quality of the impact claimed. In case the quality of the underpinning research is not up to the required standard, the case study will be regarded as not eligible for RAE 2026 and deemed as “unclassified”. For clarity, the “unclassified” rating in this case is for the ineligibility of submission for the purpose of RAE 2026, instead of the quality of the impact case study itself.

59. **Q: How to distinguish between new impact case studies and continued impact case studies?**

A: With reference to paragraph 7.5 of the Guidance Notes, case studies will be considered to be continued if both –

- (a) 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
- (b) 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.

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.

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.

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

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

## **(E) Research Environment**

### **61. Q: What is the submission requirement for research environment?**

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

- (a) one University-level Environment Overview Statement setting out the university's context and mission, strategy and resources to support research and enable impact, research culture, etc. during the assessment period from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2025 with the prescribed page limit as stipulated below –

<b>Number of eligible academic staff (headcount) in the university</b>	<b>Page limit (A4 size) for each Environment Overview Statement (including one page for attachment)</b>
3 – 300	6
301 – 600	7
601 – 800	8
801 or more	9

- (b) one UoA-level Environment Overview Statement 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 UoA during the assessment period from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2025 with the prescribed page limit as stipulated below –

<b>Number of eligible academic staff (headcount) in the UoA</b>	<b>Page limit (A4 size) for each Environment Overview Statement</b>
3 – 15	6
16 – 30	8
31 – 45	10
46 or more	13

- (c) data on staff, graduates of RPg programmes and research grants/contracts from different sources of funding etc. during the

assessment period from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2025.

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

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

A: Universities’ central resources and infrastructure could be presented in individual UoAs’ Environment Overview Statements in terms of the share or level of support accorded to the UoAs.

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

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

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

A: Similar to RAE 2020, the requirement of environment data on “graduates of RPg programmes” had undergone consultation with the universities and was subsequently announced in the Framework and Guidance Notes for RAE 2026 in October 2023 and July 2024 respectively. As there has been general acceptance on the Framework, the requirements on the environment data should be maintained. That said, the UGC will use information about the scale of universities and

UoA when considering the significance of the results of the RAE.

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

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

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

A: For the part on graduates of UGC-funded RPg Programmes for RAE 2026 Environment Data, it corresponds to Table 28.2 “Graduates of UGC-funded RPg Programmes” in the CDCF for which its prevailing Guidance Notes state that RPg students funded by UGC and RPg students supported by external funding should be reported in the table. As for the RPg student in question, “1” should be reported under Table 28.2 for CDCF, and the RAE 2026 Environment Data for the relevant year should correspond to the CDCF return concerned.

67. Q: **If the Board of Graduate School confirmed the graduation status of a RPg student in October 2023 for the academic year of 2022/23, should the student be counted in the period of “1.9.2022 – 31.8.2023” or “1.9.2023 – 31.8.2024”?**

A: As the part on graduates of UGC-funded RPg Programmes for RAE 2026 Environment Data corresponds to Table 28.2 “Graduates of UGC-funded RPg Programmes” in the CDCF returns, the prevailing CDCF Guidance Notes state under D16 that “[f]or RPg graduates, the research degree is considered to be awarded once it has been approved by the university...”. The RPg in question should be reported under the period of “1.9.2023 – 31.8.2024”.

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

A: The research grants/contracts for part (C) of the Environment Data refers to funding covered under “Head 4 Research grants/contracts” of “E8 Income” in the prevailing CDCF Guidance Notes. The funding amount in HK\$ million for each of the years from 2019/20 to 2024/25 in part (C) of the Environment Data should be –

(a) actually received by the submitting university; or

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

69. Q: **Is there any linkage between the CDCF returns Table 63 with the environment data on research grants/contracts for RAE 2026?**

A: No. Table 63 for the CDCF returns collects data on “project value” instead of “income” as required for the Environment Data for RAE 2026. The Environment Data on research grants/contracts and the return for CDCF Table 63 do not have particular linkage except that both share the definitions of “source of funding” and “research grants/research contracts” as referenced in CDCF Table 63.

70. Q: **Must the concerned staff of research grants/contracts be in the capacity of Principal investigator (PI) / Co-PI? Could research grants/contracts held by staff who are not eligible for RAE 2026 (e.g. retired staff) be counted?**

A: The funding amount to be reported should be actually received by the submitting university regardless of the capacity/role of the personnel involved in the research grants/projects. The funding to be reported do not confine to eligible staff for RAE 2026. Further, grants outside Hong Kong under the control of the submitting university, i.e. university concerned has the authority to approve the use of funds for the research grants/contracts, while funds may not necessarily be transferred to the university for use in Hong Kong could also be reported under part (C) of the Environment Data.

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

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

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

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

A: Indirect/on-costs attached to research grants/contracts will be included under part (C)(i) of the Environment Data on research grants/contracts. As for the research funding under UGC Block Grant, it will be included under item (4) of the “University-level Environment Overview Statement” and/or item (5) of the “UoA-level Environment Overview Statement” as appropriate.

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

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

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

A: Calculation of “aggregate %” in part (C)(ii) of Environment Data corresponds to the funding amount in part (C)(i), i.e. the total amount for “Ongoing Research Grants/Contracts” in each of the years from 2019/20 to 2024/25. The total of “aggregate %” in part (C)(ii) for each year should be 100%.

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

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

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

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

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

A: Similar to RAE 2020, as RAE 2026 covers 41 UoAs under 13 subject panels, there could be another side of argument that applying the same weighting to different RAE panels might cause unfairness. Therefore, the provision for panels to decide whether to attach weighting to individual aspects of research environment is maintained following the announcement of the Framework for RAE 2026.

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

A: As suggested in paragraph 66 of the General Panel Guidelines, views on appropriate sizes and organisational structures of research environments will be for specific panels to consider. As a general

principle, though, evidence of attention to achieving a suitable level of diversity in the make-up of a research environment will be regarded positively.

## **(F) Operation and Process**

### **➤ Panels**

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

A: Convenors and Deputy Convenors of the 13 panels have been appointed and the list is available on the UGC website.

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

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

A: The RAE panels will consist of mainly international non-local academics (about 65%) and some local academics in the relevant disciplines, and also local “research end-users” and professionally qualified people from business, government, industry and the arts.

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

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

A: RAE 2026 comprises three elements of assessment namely outputs (65%), impact (20%) and environment (15%). The engagement of non-local members being the majority of RAE panel membership is intended to ensure independent and fair assessment according to international standards. Local “research end-users” and professionals in

respective fields (who need not be academics) will be engaged as lay members to take part in the assessment of impact. Impact assessors mainly from the local context will also be engaged as necessary to supplement the panels' expertise in assessing the impact submissions. The ratio of local members is increased from 30% in RAE 2020 to 35% in RAE 2026 to enhance local participation. As about 35% of the RAE panel membership will come from Hong Kong, it is considered that local panel members could sufficiently provide inputs on local context and conditions during the assessment. Besides, it is worth noting the impacts for assessment in RAE 2026 may occur in any geographical location whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.

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

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

➤ ***Assessment Process***

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

A: Common quality standards will be adopted across this criterion-referenced assessment exercise. To ensure consistent adherence to the published guidelines and assessment criteria within and across panels, a trial assessment involving all RAE panels will be conducted around February/March 2026 after the submission phase.

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

A: According to the Guidance Notes and General Panel Guidelines for RAE 2026, all RAE subject panels should make their evaluation with regard to the quality, rather than the publication venue of the published item, pitching at the best international norms and the standards of rigour and scholarship expected internationally in respective disciplines or sub-disciplines. It is a responsibility of Panel Convenors to ensure that all outputs that meet the criteria for being research outputs are assessed fairly.

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

A: As stated in paragraph 3.5 of the Guidance Notes and paragraph 5 of the General Panel Guidelines, RAE panel members are appointed in their personal capacities, and should refrain from representing the interests of their affiliated institutions in the assessment of and deliberations on relevant submissions. The assignment and assessment of research outputs should be based on the match of members' expertise and caseload. Panel members will examine in detail the outputs, and put forward a recommendation with preliminary grading and comments to the panel or sub-group/sub-panel (if a panel decides to have sub-group(s)/sub-panel(s) for assessment) for a collective decision on the final grading. Panel Convenors will take care to guard against conflict of interest.

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

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

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

A: Panels will exercise their expert judgement and give a collective rating based on the merits of the submissions. There is no provision that ratings by particular categories of panel members will weigh differently in RAE 2026. The final grading of each submission will be agreed by the whole panel.

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

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

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

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

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

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

A: In the case of the same research output submitted by different universities to different panels, it is an inter-disciplinary and cross-panel referral case. The research output will be handled in accordance with the relevant paragraphs in the General Panel Guidelines for dealing with inter-disciplinary research and cross-panel referrals. In particular, paragraph 42 of the General Panel Guidelines stipulates that cross-panel referral may be initiated by the Panel Convenor/Deputy Convenor. The panel initiating such cross-panel referral is the “original panel” while the panel accepting the referral is the “receiving panel”. According to paragraph 43(b) of General Panel Guidelines, the assessment of the output, in particular inter-disciplinary output, could be conducted jointly by the “original panel” and the “receiving panel”, and each panel will each assign one panel member to conduct the assessment. Grading and comments given by the panel member of the “receiving panel” will be forwarded to the Panel Convenor of the “original panel”. The decision on the final grading of the item should rest with the “original panel”. Multiple submissions (regardless if they are from the same universities) will be flagged by the UGC Secretariat to the concerned panels.

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

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

## (G) Results

92. Q: **In what form will the results of RAE 2026 be published?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

A: Similar to RAE 2020, following extensive consultation with universities on RAE 2026, it has been promulgated in the Framework and Guidance

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

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

A: No. As in previous RAEs, the Guidance Notes for RAE 2026 state that results will be published without disclosing the identities of individual academic staff members, in line with the principle that the RAE measures research quality on a UoA basis, not individual staff. More importantly, the academic development of individual faculty members/researchers should be a continuing process that involves dimensions other than research. As the RAE only covers up to four research outputs per academic staff in the six-year assessment period, its primary purpose is not intended to evaluate individual staff.

## **(H) Others**

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

96. Q: **How will the RAE 2026 results be used by the UGC to determine funding allocation to the eight UGC-funded universities?**

A: The UGC will decide on the funding methodology after the completion of RAE 2026. Universities will be informed of the method used after the funding recommendations are accepted by the authorities.

97. Q: **How much funding will be informed by the RAE 2026 results, and when will this be determined?**

A: That will be for the UGC to decide in the light of its future budget and

any future policy considerations. For information, in the 2022-25 triennium, the Research Portion of the Block Grant is about HK\$4.9 billion per year and 80% to 85% of the Research Portion is informed by the RAE 2020 results. The Research Portion is subsumed under the Block Grant to universities which are given the autonomy to allocate funds internally as they see fit.

98. Q: **Will UGC share the costs borne by universities in undertaking RAE 2026?**

A: The UGC will bear half of the licence fee in respect of copyright clearance for the research outputs submitted for RAE 2026, subject to a maximum of HK\$500 per research output.

➤ ***Release of RAE Information***

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

A: The General Panel Guidelines and Panel-specific Guidelines on Assessment Criteria and Working Methods (Panel-specific Guidelines) are announced to universities in October 2024, about 14 months before the due dates for universities to make submissions for RAE 2026. The Panel-specific Guidelines have included details on individual RAE panels' guidance and requirements on research outputs, impact and environment.

➤ ***Trial Assessment***

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

A: Paragraph 93 of the General Panel Guidelines suggests that the trial assessment be conducted by all members of the panel, who will then discuss their observations, with a view to enabling standardisation of approaches and fine-tuning of the process. As stipulated in paragraph 60 of respective Panel-specific Guidelines, submissions used for the trial assessment will be assessed afresh during the main assessment period regardless of their assessment results during the trial assessment. Panel members are appointed to carry out the assessment

in a fair and impartial manner. Panels will decide on the choice of samples for trial assessment, and they will be reminded to proceed with the subsequent formal assessment according to the published guidelines and standards. The advantages of the trial assessment remain that it will enable valuable learning, standardisation of approaches, and “fine tuning” of the process.

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UGC Secretariat  
31 October 2024