Section 3: Criteria and working methods

Main Panel H
Covers the following UOAs:

- 30 Architecture and the Built Environment 23
- 31 Town and Country Planning 33
- 32 Geography and Environmental Studies 41
- 33 Archaeology 51

Absences of chair and declaration of interests from members

1. The main panel will elect a deputy chair from among its membership. The deputy chair will assume responsibility for the meeting in the absence of the chair or when the chair has a declared major interest in a submission. The deputy will undertake the normal duties of the chair for that meeting, but will refer the final decision on substantive matters to the chair via a personal briefing, except where the chair has a declared major interest.

2. Panel members have made declarations of interest. These will be kept under review and will be a discussion item on the agenda for each main and sub-panel meeting. Panel members will withdraw from meetings when submissions are discussed from the institutions in which they have declared a major interest. In the case of minor interests, such as co-investigation or co-authorship, members will declare this and will not take lead or sole responsibility for assessing the published output linked to that research.

How the main panel will work with its sub-panels

3. Main panels are responsible for:
   a. Reviewing and endorsing the criteria and working methods to be used by the sub-panels.
   b. Endorsing the quality profile to be awarded to each submission following recommendations from the sub-panels.
   c. Maintaining a good level of communication and joint working with the other main panels.
   d. Providing leadership and guidance to sub-panels.
   e. Ensuring consistency of policy and practice within the sub-panels.
4. Sub-panels are responsible for:
   a. Preparing draft statements of relevant criteria and working methods.
   b. Making recommendations to main panels on the quality profiles to be awarded for each submission.

5. A close working relationship between the main panel and sub-panels will be encouraged through sharing agendas and papers, and through clear lines of communication between main and sub-panel chairs.

6. The main panel will review the areas where specialist advice is required for each sub-panel. It will encourage sub-panels to seek specialist advice or cross-referral where work is submitted which the sub-panel does not feel qualified to assess.

**Elements of variation in the criteria statements**

7. The broad weightings for each assessment component will be applied consistently across the sub-panels, as will the consideration of data on research students and income as elements of the assessment of the research environment.

**Consistency of quality levels**

8. Consistency between the sub-panels in applying quality levels will be assured through the main panel meetings, which comprise all relevant sub-panel chairs, and through monitoring undertaken by the panel secretary and assistant panel secretary, who both serve on all sub-panels. In addition, effective communication will be established outside the formal meeting structure between the chairs of the main and sub-panels.

9. During the assessment phase in 2008 there will be a number of main panel meetings. Their purpose is to examine issues arising, and ensure consistency across the sub-panels, particularly in applying quality grades and assessing individual staff circumstances in relation to the volume of research outputs.

10. Sub-panels within Main Panel H will apply the following weightings to the three elements of submissions: research outputs 75%, research environment 15%, and esteem indicators 10%.

11. Research student data and research income will be assessed as part of the research environment element. Departments may, however, highlight the existence of particularly prestigious and highly competitive research studentships or funding awards as indicators of esteem.

12. Each sub-panel within Main Panel H will aim to examine in detail all items of output submitted to it, except for circumstances beyond the control of the sub-panels (such as those described in the generic statement). For planning purposes, departments will be canvassed on their submission intentions in the spring of 2007. This exercise will provide information to assist in the appointment of specialist advisors, and exceptionally, additional panel members to ensure that sub-panels are properly resourced to undertake the assessment of all submissions.

**Range of indicators of excellence**

13. Research excellence will be judged against the key criteria of originality, significance and rigour. These criteria for excellence will be applied consistently to all types of research, including basic or strategic, interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary, and applied or practice-based work. The criteria are considered sufficiently flexible to assess the full range of research outputs.

14. The assessment of the research environment will be based on evidence of the extent to which it has contributed to the production of original, significant and rigorous research. Research esteem will be considered by sub-panels as a measure of the external recognition of a department’s original, significant and rigorous research activity.

15. All judgements about the quality of outputs will be based on the criteria of originality, significance and rigour, regardless of individual circumstances that may have resulted in a reduction in the number of outputs submitted.

16. The sub-panels will be guided by the principles laid out below when making quality judgements on research outputs, environment and esteem.
Research outputs

17. The main panel recognises the diverse range of disciplines represented by its sub-panels. It therefore sets out below the broad parameters for the assessment of research outputs, within which a degree of variation may be exercised by specific sub-panels. Note that terms such as ‘international’ and ‘national’ do not refer to the geographical scope of work, but to its quality and impact; see Annex 1.

- **4* –** quality that is world-leading; this work will be internationally outstanding, displaying a very high level of originality, significance and rigour; it will be innovative, potentially agenda-setting in research and/or policy fields
- **3* –** quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour; this work will significantly advance research and/or policy agendas
- **2* –** quality that is recognised internationally in terms of its originality, significance and rigour, advancing its field
- **1* –** quality that is recognised nationally in terms of its originality, significance and rigour, contributing to existing paradigms and agendas
- **Unclassified –** quality that falls below the standard of nationally recognised work; work which does not meet the published definition of research for the RAE; or ‘missing’ outputs, where the reason for submitting fewer than four outputs has not been accepted by the sub-panel.

Research environment

18. In measuring the quality of the research environment, the criteria used by each sub-panel will assess the degree to which the department’s research achievements reflect the standards of its research strategy, structure and management, as well as its infrastructure and resources, students and studentships, and research income. These criteria will lead to the definition of an agreed profile based on the following quality level descriptors:

- **4* –** evidence of an outstanding research environment
- **3* –** evidence of an excellent research environment
- **2* –** evidence of a good research environment
- **1* –** evidence of an adequate research environment
- **Unclassified –** lack of evidence of an adequate research environment.

Esteem indicators

19. In measuring the quality of esteem indicators and defining a profile, each sub-panel will make a judgement about the level of impact and recognition of the department and its members on research, scholarship, policy and practice; and the contributions made to the sustainability of scholarly academic activity, and of the appropriate research and policy communities. This assessment will be based on a statement in RA5a describing the esteem within which the department as a whole is held, and on a listing for all Category A and C staff of their most significant indicators of esteem in no more than 75 words per submitted member of staff. These criteria will lead to the definition of an agreed profile based on the following quality level descriptors:

- **4* –** outstanding impact and recognition
- **3* –** excellent impact and recognition
- **2* –** good impact and recognition
- **1* –** recognition of an adequate contribution
- **Unclassified –** lack of evidence of an adequate contribution or impact in terms of esteem indicators.

Individual staff circumstances

20. Sub-panels will positively encourage departments to submit those individuals whose volume of research output may have been limited for reasons covered by equal opportunities
legislation, as set out in RAE 02/2005 'Equality briefing for panel chairs, members and secretaries'. In their assessments, sub-panels will look for evidence of a supportive research environment which actively encourages the development of researchers.

21. In assessing submissions, all sub-panels will take account of individual staff circumstances in the categories listed in paragraph 39 of the generic statement which may prevent researchers from submitting the maximum of four outputs.

22. In addition, the sub-panels will be mindful of specific health and safety restrictions which may have prevented them from undertaking some types of research during the assessment period, such as those imposed on pregnant and nursing women for laboratory-based research, or limited access to field-based research.

23. Departments should describe any special circumstances affecting the number of research outputs in RA5b, in which a brief explanation should be provided as to how these circumstances have affected the number of research outputs an individual has produced during the assessment period.

Methods for ensuring consistency for applying common criteria

24. Main Panel H defines clear expectations across all the sub-panels within its remit: up to four outputs to be submitted in respect of each Category A or C member of staff submitted (with four the normal expectation); common weightings for the output, environment and esteem components of the assessment; a common view on the need for originality, significance and rigour in pure, applied and practice-based work; a common view on measures of excellence; and common criteria for equality of treatment of evidence.

25. In order to promote consistency, the main panel will receive copies of all sub-panel minutes and documents. In addition, the main panel chair will attend at least one sub-panel meeting for each UOA during the assessment phase.

26. It is expected that main panel chairs will meet during the assessment phase in order to ensure broad consistency across main panels where appropriate.

27. The international and additional main panel members are full members of the panel, and will be involved at all stages of the assessment process.

28. The panel secretariat operate at both main and sub-panel levels, and will advise on consistency of approach between sub-panels. Sub-panel chairs will maintain informal contact with the main panel chair as issues arise which require advice or guidance, particularly about consistency in applying the criteria.

Applied research and/or practice-based research

29. All research will be assessed using the common principles of originality, significance and rigour. These criteria for excellence will be applied equally across all forms of research, including applied or practice-based work, which meets the RAE2008 published definition of research. These criteria are sufficiently flexible to be applied to the full range of research outputs.

30. A broad indication of the range of research which might be submitted to UOAs within Main Panel H is set out below:

a. Basic or strategic research, defined as original investigation undertaken in order to gain understanding for its own sake.

b. Applied research, defined as work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, the voluntary sector and the wider public.

c. Practice-based research, defined as work which is intended to inform various kinds of practice directly, or work that has been derived from practice.

Panel observers

31. Panel observers representing the UK Research Councils may comment on a number of issues, including the competitive nature of different research funding schemes, and procedures in the Research Councils to ensure adequate opportunities to support interdisciplinary research.
Discipline-specific matters

32. Sub-panels within Main Panel H are characterised by a range of disciplines within their subject areas, and therefore the panel is well equipped to deal with interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research. Sub-panels will be encouraged to apply the key criteria of originality, significance and rigour consistently to the wide variety of research within their disciplines.

33. Sub-panels may choose to cross-refer work to another sub-panel where they feel that their members do not have the expertise to judge a particular section of the submission, or may seek a view from a specialist adviser. Similarly, departments can request cross-referral for certain sections of a submission. The final decision on recommended quality profiles will remain with the sub-panel to which the item was originally submitted.