Section 3: Criteria and working methods

Main Panel J

Covers the following UOAs:

- 38 Law 23
- 39 Politics and International Studies 29
- 40 Social Work and Social Policy & Administration 37
- 41 Sociology 45
- 42 Anthropology 53
- 43 Development Studies 61

Absences of chair and declaration of interests

1. In cases of planned or unforeseen absence of the chair, the panel has elected a deputy chair who shall act on the chair’s behalf. Where consensus cannot be reached, decisions will be deferred until the deputy chair has an opportunity to consult with the chair. Where any member of the panel declares a major interest in an institution being discussed, they will withdraw from the discussion. Where the chair has declared an interest, the deputy chair will lead discussion for that item. Should the main panel chair and deputy chair declare an interest in the same institution, the panel will elect a member to lead discussion for the item.

2. Members will declare any minor interests in advance, and the chair will decide whether they should not take lead or sole responsibility for assessing the submission, or leave the room, referring to the guidelines provided by the RAE team, at Annex 4.

How the main panel will work with its sub-panels

3. 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.

4. Main panels are responsible for:
   a. Reviewing and endorsing the criteria and working methods to be used by the sub-panels.
   b. Deciding on 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.
5. Main Panel J will employ a number of approaches, including *ad hoc* meetings and electronic-based discussion, to promote ongoing contact between sub-panel chairs and the main panel chair. The sub-panel chairs have shared draft statements of criteria and working methods to identify and explore issues of variation and ensure broad consistency of approach. Sub-panels will also refer matters of principle in their approach to the main panel for feedback and discussion during the assessment phase. The sub-panel chairs will share examples of approaches to assessing submissions – particularly in relation to interdisciplinary areas, practice-based or applied research, and in developing quality profiles of the three elements judged against the quality levels.

**Range of indicators of excellence**

**Research outputs**

6. The sub-panels will assess the level of quality in relation to the originality, significance and rigour of the output as defined in the quality level descriptors (see paragraph 16). Each sub-panel has commented upon the interpretation of these criteria in the context of its UOA, particularly with regard to significance. The sub-panels will assess different forms of research – eg, applied research and practice-based research – using these criteria, noting that the format of output may differ according to different disciplines. The sub-panels will show flexibility on the benchmarks of excellence when assessing interdisciplinary research that is at the cutting edge of the research area, to ensure new and emerging areas of research are not disadvantaged. They will cross-reference to other sub-panels or seek opinion from specialist advisers as appropriate.

7. The sub-panels of Main Panel J expect to examine in detail virtually all of the outputs submitted. Outputs will be assessed on their own merits in the context of the submitted work of the department as a whole. Departments are encouraged to submit the highest quality outputs published within the assessment period by the members of staff they wish to submit. Sub-panels will consider whether any adjustment to the overall quality profile should be made to reflect the submission of items which they recognise as being of exceptional scale and scope.

8. The sub-panels recognise that many outputs will be jointly authored; these will be assessed by the standards that apply to all outputs. The sub-panels expect that a member of staff who returns jointly authored work will have made a substantial contribution to it. The sub-panels also accept that a jointly authored output may be listed by more than one individual in a department’s submission. In such cases it will be assessed at the same quality level. Where it appears that the number of jointly authored works in the submission indicates a lower than normal overall volume of research activity, a proportional adjustment may be applied when constructing the submission’s quality profile.

**Research environment**

9. The sub-panels will assess the quality of the research environment in terms of the extent to which it supports, or is capable of supporting, research activity as defined in the quality levels. Indicators of excellence will include *inter alia*:

a. Postgraduate research student numbers per research-active staff and research degrees awarded; and infrastructure and facilities for postgraduate research students. Sub-panels may place different emphases on the numbers and sources of postgraduate studentship awards to reflect the discipline context.

b. Research income – sub-panels may place different emphases on the amount of income and sources, including income from competitive sources, commissioned research or proposals to sponsors.

c. Research strategy – sub-panels will consider, where relevant, the extent to which the goals set out in 2001 have been achieved or successfully adapted over the period of the current RAE. The sub-panels will also consider the extent to which the strategy will ensure a sustainable and active research culture, evidence for which would include:

i. The nature and quality of the research infrastructure.
ii. Arrangements for supporting interdisciplinary or collaborative research.

iii. Relations and research collaboration with the public and voluntary sectors, and the involvement of service users in research.

iv. Arrangements for developing and supporting staff in their research.

v. Arrangements for developing the research work of colleagues new to research and for integrating them into a wider, supportive research culture.

vi. Recognition by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as a research training outlet.

vii. Support to journals where all or most of the editors are located in the department.

Esteem

10. The sub-panels will assess the quality of esteem indicators in terms of the extent to which they reflect research activity as defined in the quality levels. The sub-panels recognise that the level and range of esteem indicators likely to be displayed will vary according to the different career stages of the staff submitted.

11. Indicators of esteem will include *inter alia*:

- journal editorships
- keynote addresses or prestigious public lectures given, or organisation of conferences or symposia
- membership of Research Councils or advisers to select committees
- advisers on policy or practice issues to Government, voluntary bodies, other national, international, regional or local agencies or other contributions to public service
- awards or prizes
- international recognition, eg. international research collaborations, or visiting research posts in overseas institutions.

12. Sub-panels may place different emphases on the above according to the characteristics and research context of their discipline, as described in the relevant UOA criteria.

Elements of variation in the criteria statements

13. The sub-panels of Main Panel J have sought to achieve a consistent approach to working methods and criteria where appropriate, unless the context of the discipline requires additional or alternative approaches. Departments should read the main panel statement alongside the generic and sub-panel statements.

14. Sub-panels will vary in the emphasis placed on the significance of the output in relation to policy development or analysis. Some sub-panels may invite departments to highlight evidence of these aspects in the ‘Other relevant details’ field in RA2. This reflects the role of some of the UOAs in public policy research. In their assessment of the research environment, sub-panels may place different emphases on the importance of the level of research income and the number and source of studentships. This reflects differences in the character of research in different disciplines, differing amounts of research income available to the discipline from public or private sources, and the level of competitive studentships available. In relation to evidence of esteem, some sub-panels may take into account evidence of esteem by user communities.

Consistency of quality levels

15. During the assessment phase, the sub-panels will share with the main panel examples of their approaches to assessment, to identify areas of inconsistency of approach. The sub-panels will ensure that they do not apply criteria in a way that the 4* quality level is only attainable by certain types of research or certain types and sizes of department.

16. The sub-panels will judge outputs against the following quality levels:

a. **4* – quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour.** This standard will be achieved by a research output that is, or is likely to become, a primary reference point of the field or sub-field.

b. **3* – quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour but which**
nonetheless falls short of the highest standards of excellence. This standard will be achieved by a research output that is, or is likely to become, a major reference point that substantially advances knowledge and understanding of the field or sub-field.

c. 2* – quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour. This standard will be achieved by a research output that is, or is likely to become, a reference point that advances knowledge and understanding of the field or sub-field.

d. 1* – quality that is recognised nationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour. This standard will be achieved by a research output that makes, or is likely to make, a contribution to knowledge or understanding of the field or sub-field.

e. Unclassified – quality that falls below the standard of nationally recognised work or which does not meet the published definition of research for the purposes of this assessment.

17. In respect of research environment and esteem, sub-panels will reach a holistic judgement of the quality of the research environment and esteem as portrayed in a department’s submission. The sub-panels will initially assign 100% of the profile allocated to each element to one of the quality levels (4*, 3*, 2*, 1* or Unclassified). Where there are clear differences in the quality of aspects of the research environment or esteem (eg, between studentships and research culture, or for different research groups or departments within the submission), the sub-panels may decide to allocate a profile across two or more quality levels.

18. Outputs will be the most important component of the quality profile, with a weighting of 75%, reflecting the overall significance of research output in contributing to research activity across the cognate disciplines. The quality of the research environment, including research income and research student data, will be weighted at 20%, reflecting the importance placed by the disciplines on the contribution made by the research environment to the sustainability of research quality. The quality of esteem will be weighted at 5%, acknowledging the distinct contribution that engagement with external organisations, external recognition, collaborative activities and other services to the wider research community can bring to the research activity of a department.

Methods for ensuring consistency

19. The main panel chair will attend some of the sub-panel meetings during the assessment phase to provide feedback and guidance on consistency of application of criteria between panels.

20. During the assessment phase, the sub-panel chairs will share examples of approaches by the sub-panel to assessment of submissions – particularly in relation to interdisciplinary areas, practice-based research or applied research, and in developing quality profiles of the three elements judged against the quality levels. To ensure consistency of application of the criteria, the sub-panel chairs will also compare examples of any dispensation given for a lower number of outputs due to individual staff circumstances, or where adjustments have been made to reflect the submission of items of exceptional scale and scope.

21. The main panel chair will seek confirmation from sub-panel chairs that sub-panels are taking account of all the different components of the submission and considering the overall profile as a reflection of the research activity in the submission.

Applied research and practice-based research

22. There are substantial levels of applied research and practice-based research activity in the UOAs within Main Panel J. This may include action research and participatory research. The sub-panels will assess the outputs of this research, which may include confidential reports. The panels fully recognise this type of research and will consider the quality of the research against the same indicators of excellence as other forms of research, ie, in relation to its originality, significance and rigour. Sub-panels may invite departments to draw attention to the impact of the research, eg, on the
policy-making or user community, in the 'Other relevant details’ field in RA2.

**Individual staff circumstances**

23. In assessing submissions, all sub-panels will take account, as a minimum, of the circumstances described in paragraph 39 of the generic statement, where the quantity of outputs may have been affected.

**Early career researchers**

24. Sub-panels welcome the inclusion of early career researchers in a department's submission. It is the expectation of sub-panels that early career researchers appointed between 1 August 2003 and 31 July 2005 will submit a minimum of two outputs; those appointed after 1 August 2005 will be expected to submit a minimum of one output. Where fewer than four outputs are submitted, an appropriate adjustment will be made to ensure that departments are not disadvantaged by their inclusion of early career researchers.

**Category C staff**

25. The outputs of staff in Categories A and C will be assessed according to the same criteria. In the case of Category C staff, departments should use RA5c to demonstrate the sustained commitment of individuals to the research activity of the department. Examples of such commitment might include: co-authorship with Category A staff, co-directorship of externally funded research grants, supervision of research students, or participation in graduate training programmes. The contribution of any Category C staff for whom a sustained commitment has not been demonstrated will be discounted from all components of the submission. The inclusion of insufficiently integrated Category C staff in a submission may additionally have an adverse effect on the quality profile for the research environment.

**Treatment of individual staff circumstances**

26. Main Panel J and its sub-panels regard the submission of four outputs per researcher as the normal expectation for this period, unless circumstances are deemed by the sub-panels to justify the submission of fewer outputs for an individual researcher. Where fewer than four outputs per researcher are submitted, the sub-panel will consider each case on its merits in the context of information provided by the department in the narrative parts of the submission (RA5b). Departments are invited to comment upon the timing, duration and impact of special circumstances in relation to an individual researcher's activity. In the case of part-time staff, departments are also asked to indicate the proportion of an individual researcher's FTE across the assessment period. Where the cited circumstances explain the submission of fewer than four outputs per researcher, or where they are judged to provide partial dispensation, a proportional volume adjustment will be applied to the submission when calculating the quality profile for outputs.

27. The quality profile for outputs will be calculated as follows:
   a. Where there are four outputs per researcher, these will be assessed and assigned quality levels. These quality levels will then be carried forward to the overall departmental profile.
   b. If an individual researcher has produced fewer than four outputs, an evaluation will be made of the reason for this on the basis of information within the department's submission.
   c. If there is a valid reason for the submission of fewer than four outputs, only the quality level(s) attached to the submitted output(s) will be carried forward into the overall departmental profile.
   d. If there is no valid reason for the submission of fewer than four outputs, the ‘missing’ outputs will be graded as Unclassified.
   e. After taking into account any reductions in volume of outputs due to individual staff circumstances as described above, and assessing the quality of all the submitted outputs, sub-panels will consider whether any additional adjustment to the quality profile should be made to reflect the submission of items of exceptional scale and scope.
28. The percentage of outputs falling into each quality level can then be calculated to form the overall departmental profile.

**Panel observers**

29. Sub-panels will notify the main panel of queries relating to the Research Councils’ arm of dual-support funding that may arise from their consideration of submissions. Panel observers may attend sub-panel meetings to provide advice on these queries at the invitation of the sub-panel chair, and with the agreement of the main panel chair, should more detailed discussion be required. The sub-panels have requested that departments describe the evidential basis of their claims for the research environment and esteem elements. The sub-panels may seek clarification from the Research Council observers about the nature of their funding (e.g., competitive or peer-reviewed awards).