Section 3: Criteria and working methods

Main Panel L

Covers the following UOAs:

- 47 American Studies and Anglophone Area Studies
- 48 Middle Eastern and African Studies
- 49 Asian Studies
- 50 European Studies

Absences of chair and declaration of interests from members

1. If the main panel chair is absent for a main panel meeting, an acting chair will be elected from among attending panel members on an *ad hoc* basis. The acting chair will have the same powers and duties as the main panel chair.

2. If a sub-panel chair is unable to attend a main panel meeting, a deputy will be appointed from among the sub-panel members.

3. Panel members will withdraw from the discussion of any submission in which they have declared a current or recent major interest. The formal note of the discussion provided by the panel secretary and agreed with the members present will be the only part of that discussion to which they are party.

4. In addition to previously declared interests, panel members will be vigilant in identifying and reporting new interests that might emerge, including minor interests, during the detailed assessment phase. The sub-panel will follow the courses of action proposed in Annex 4.

How the main panel will work with its sub-panels

5. 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.

6. 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.
7. In the first year of the exercise, the main panel chair has visited at least one meeting of each sub-panel to promote consistency of approach and to offer guidance on matters common to all sub-panels.

8. All material correspondence will be copied to the main panel chair and secretary. Where appropriate, the chair will offer guidance on the matter or matters in question to facilitate the general principle of consistency.

9. Minutes of all sub-panel meetings will be circulated to main panel members. Minutes will be supplemented by reports from sub-panel chairs on areas of best practice, areas of concern or problems, and on issues raised by sub-panels. Sub-panel chairs will in the main report on matters of principle, procedures and consistency.

10. The main panel will accept collective responsibility for its decisions. In the first instance decisions will be reached by debated consensus. Where consensus cannot be reached, panel members and the chair will hold a vote. Where the matter is still not resolved, the chair will cast the deciding vote.

Range of indicators of excellence

11. The range of indicators of excellence for research outputs will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- originality
- imaginative range
- significance, as demonstrated by the extent to which knowledge or understanding in the field has been increased or practice has been or is likely to be improved
- rigour.

12. The panel will assess the quality of outputs in terms of the quality levels defined in Annex 1. The panel interprets each quality level as follows:

- 4* – Quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour: Research of the highest standards which is paradigm-shifting or which in the panel’s informed judgment is likely to become so; or which is of exceptional intellectual and developmental importance to the subject area; or which is definitive or likely to be a primary point of reference within the area; or which will very substantially enhance informed debate or policy. All other quality levels will be related to this standard

- 3* – Quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour but which nonetheless falls short of the highest standards of excellence: Research that in the panel’s informed judgment is excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour, and is, or is likely to be, a major point of reference within the area, and which is likely to make a major contribution to knowledge, theory or practice

- 2* – Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour: Research that in the panel’s informed judgment is very good in terms of originality, significance and rigour, and is, or is likely to be, a point of reference within the area and which is likely to make a significant contribution to knowledge, theory or practice

- 1* – Quality that is recognised nationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour: Research that in the panel’s informed judgment is good in terms of originality, significance and rigour, and is, or is likely to be, a contribution to work within the area, and which is likely to make a contribution to knowledge, theory or practice

- Unclassified – Quality that falls below the standard of nationally recognised work. Or work which does not meet the published definition of research for the purposes of this assessment: Research of a quality that in the panel’s informed judgment does not meet the definition of 1*, or which does not meet the published definition of research for the purposes of the RAE.
13. The range of indicators of excellence for the research environment may include the following illustrative but not exhaustive examples:

- research student data
- publications, prizes and other achievements by research students
- monitoring mechanisms for research students – progress and completions
- research income
- quality of research infrastructure
- staff development in relation to research
- mechanisms for promoting research
- collaborative research
- definition and purpose of research groups
- participation in conferences
- research with or for public bodies, commerce or industry
- developing the research of scholars early in their research careers
- research strategy
- hosting scholarly journals, research fellowships and distinguished visiting scholars
- establishment, maintenance and enhancement of access to research resources, e.g., special collections, museums, artefacts, data sets and primary texts.

14. The range of indicators of excellence for esteem may include the following illustrative but not exhaustive examples:

- editorships of scholarly journals
- invited lectures, especially keynote presentations
- conference organisation and hosting, depending on the status of the event
- membership of peer review bodies, research committees or learned institutes
- research fellowships
- research consultancies
- distinguished visiting scholars
- substantial national or international committee work
- number of PhD (research degree) external examiner appointments
- reader for publishers or journals
- research-based awards and honours
- other contributions to the academic and public good, including those beyond HE, e.g., to the arts, media and creative and other industries.

**Consistency of quality levels and methods for ensuring consistency in applying common criteria**

15. All sub-panels within Main Panel L will apply weightings of 75% to outputs, 15% to research environment and 10% to esteem indicators.

16. The consistent application of criteria will be fostered procedurally by the dedicated secretariat support.

17. Regular reports to the main panel from sub-panel chairs on problem areas will cultivate a collaborative approach between the main and sub-panels. Sub-panel chairs will give evidence on how similar problems are being addressed in their own area. This approach will highlight instances of unacceptable variation from agreed criteria and working methods.

18. Matters for discussion at main panel meetings will emerge by encouraging an open and collegial approach to communication between main and sub-panels.

19. Where interdisciplinary research is submitted, the panel will consult with other panels or specialist advisers where appropriate to ensure an inclusive and equitable assessment of any interdisciplinary research submissions. Given the particular disciplines involved, external specialist advice will in most cases be sought from international experts. Where advice from an external expert is felt to be required, sub-panels through their chairs will consult with the main panel chair. They will together agree an individual
for proposal to the RAE team. By its nature, and by the nature of its sub-panels, the main panel is capable of dealing with interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary research, as well as single-discipline research.

Elements of variation in the criteria statements and justification

20. Sub-panel 48, Middle Eastern and African Studies, will receive information on the total number of research grants; Sub-panel 50, European Studies, will receive information on doctoral degrees awarded per staff FTE, studentships per staff FTE and income by source per staff FTE. These additional data need only be appended to RA4.

Individual staff circumstances

21. In assessing submissions, all sub-panels will take account of individual staff circumstances cited by departments in relation to any of the categories listed at paragraph 39 of the generic statement.

22. No adjustments to the sub-panels' qualitative judgments will be made as a result of a justifiable reduction in the volume of research submitted.

Applied research and practice-based research

23. The panel recognises that applied, practice-based and creative research includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce and industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors. The sub-panels will ensure the equitable application of its indicators of excellence (originality, imaginative range, significance and rigour) to the assessment of such work.

24. Applied, practice-based and creative research will be assessed with regard to the following principles:
   a. The assessment of applied research will take account of the process(es) by which research is disseminated, and its value to users.
   b. Not all creative activity or practice constitutes research.
   c. There is much high quality research effectively undertaken when embedded in creative activities, performance or practice.
   d. A creative, practice-based or performance output will not stand on its own as a record of research activity. Any research output submitted for assessment should be accompanied by a record or route map of the research process, presented as text in the ‘Other relevant details’ field of RA2. Sub-panels will accept other creative, practice-based or performance outputs associated with the record or route map outlining the research process of the original submitted output, but the sub-panel should specify clearly what additional material (if any) needs to be submitted to ensure the clear demarcation of research processes for each output.
   e. The key requirement for the assessment of creative, practice-based or performance outputs will be that the research has brought about enhancements to knowledge and understanding in the discipline or its related disciplinary areas. This requirement excludes research undertaken to produce content.

Panel observers

25. The main panel includes an observer from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) who may be invited to offer Research Council perspectives, particularly on mechanisms for assessing applied research and interdisciplinary research, and on strategic issues relating for example to the health of the disciplines and the research environment.

Discipline-specific matters

26. The panel will take account of those researchers who have been denied access to research resources due to political or other developments.