Section A4: Assessment criteria: environment

Environment template

85.   Main Panel A believes that excellent research can be undertaken in a wide variety of research structures and environments. The main panel has no pre-formed view of the ideal size or organisational structure for a research environment, and will judge each submission on its merits.

86.   In this context, using the information provided in the environment template (REF5) and the environment data (REF4), sub-panels will assess the vitality and sustainability of the submitting unit and its contribution to the vitality and sustainability of its discipline. The sub-panels recognise that the health of the discipline requires appropriate infrastructures and activity at HEI level to maintain and develop individuals and groups of researchers, and to train new generations of researchers.

87.   Given that for the REF there is no expectation that the environment element of submissions relates to a single coherent organisational unit, submissions may define groups and their members. Groups may be departments/research groups or units which may or may not be cognate. This gives an opportunity to explicitly state how enhanced multi- and/or interdisciplinary research is being encouraged. Institutions should define their prime activities, how they operate and their main achievements. It is recognised that submissions may consist of a single group which may or may not relate to a single coherent organisational unit.

88.   To facilitate the assessment of submissions, when defining groups and their members, institutions should identify groups of staff and their associated outputs (in REF1 and REF2), and use the same groupings in the environment template (REF5). The same groups should be referred to in the impact template (REF3a) where relevant.

89.   Evidence and indicators for environment may include, but are not limited to, the indicators listed below under each of the section headings in the environment template (REF5):

a.   **Overview**: This section should briefly describe the organisation and structure of the unit to set the context for sub-panels assessing the submission. It should be used to describe which research groups or units are covered by the submission, and how research is structured across the submitted unit. This section will be assessed in combination with the research strategy (see paragraph 94).

b.   **Research strategy**: This section should provide evidence of the achievement of strategic aims for research during the assessment period; details of future strategic aims and goals for research; how these relate to the structure described above; and how they will be taken forward. Evidence and indicators may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- details of significant changes, if any, to the research environment over the assessment period

- evidence of strong research plans: a statement of the main objectives and activities in research over the next five years, including capacity building, research student recruitment, the involvement of service users, and any ongoing research work that is not producing immediately visible outcomes; balance sought between long-term and short-term research; the development of infrastructure to facilitate research; and ongoing work which is not producing immediate visible outcomes

- responsiveness to national and international priorities and initiatives

- effective mechanisms for the development, promotion and dissemination of research

- research groupings, their activities, their rationale, how they operate and their main achievements

- mechanisms and practices for promoting research, and sustaining and developing an active and vital research culture

- evidence of multi- and/or interdisciplinary developments.

c.   **People**:

i.   **Staffing strategy and staff development** within the submitted unit. Evidence and indicators may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- evidence of how the staffing strategy relates to the unit's research strategy and physical infrastructure

- implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

- evidence of how the submitting unit supports equalities and diversity

- effective integration of clinical academics and NHS-employed active researchers

- sustainable staff structure

- arrangements for the effective development and support of the research work of staff

- a description of how the unit has been developing the research of early career researchers and support for integrating them into a wider, supportive research culture

- research career development of both non-clinical and clinical researchers

- role of clinical researchers where relevant.

ii. **Research students**: The training and supervision of postgraduate research (PGR) students. Evidence and indicators may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- effective and sustainable doctoral research training

- evidence of a strong and integrated research student culture

- evidence of CASE awards and application of technology generated by research students.

d. **Income, infrastructure and facilities**: Information about research income, infrastructure and facilities. Evidence and indicators may include but are not limited to the following:

- the nature and quality of the research infrastructure and facilities, including significant equipment, research facilities and facilities for research students

- evidence of cross-HEI shared or collaborative use of research infrastructure

- significance of major benefits-in-kind (including, for example, donated items of equipment, sponsorships secured, or other arrangements directly related to research)

- policy and practice in relation to research governance.

e. **Collaboration and contribution to the discipline or research base**: Contributions to the wider research base, including work with other researchers outside the submitted unit whether locally, nationally or internationally; support for research collaboration; and interdisciplinary research. Evidence and indicators may include but are not limited to the following:

- indicators of wider influence or contributions to the discipline or research base

- participation in the peer-review process (for example, national and international grants committees, editorial boards)

- fellowships and relevant awards

- journal editorships

- effective academic collaboration

- extent of collaboration or integration with external bodies, such as NHS Research and Development, and/or with industry, government agencies, where appropriate

- responsiveness to national and international priorities and initiatives

- effective mechanisms to promote collaborative research, and to promote collaboration at national and international level within the academic community and/or with users of research (whether with industry or the public sector).

Environment data

90. 'Guidance on submissions' (Section 3, Part 4) sets out quantitative data relating to the research environment to be included in submissions (REF4a/b/c). Sub-panels will use the data in the context of the information provided in the environment template (REF5) to inform their assessment. Data on research doctoral degrees awarded (REF4a) will be used to inform the sub-panels' assessment in relation to 'research students' (section c.ii). Data on research income (REF4b/c) will be used to inform the sub-panels' assessment in relation to 'income, infrastructure and facilities' (section d).

91. Sub-panels within Main Panel A do not require quantitative data provided by institutions in REF4a/b/c to be reported by research group.

Environment criteria

92. The sub-panels will assess the environment according to the generic criteria and level definitions in 'guidance on submissions', Annex A, Table A4. The criteria will be understood as follows:

- **Vitality** will be considered as the extent to which a unit provides an encouraging and facilitating environment for research, has an effective strategic plan, is engaged with the national and international research community, is able to attract excellent postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers through a worldwide reputation and, where appropriate for the subject area, is supported by a portfolio of research funding.

- **Sustainability** will be understood as a coherent vision for the future, and investment in people and in infrastructure.

93. In assessing the environment element of submissions, panels will apply the criteria in terms of both the research environment within the submitting unit, and its participation in and contribution to the academic discipline and community of relevance to the UOA.

94. In forming the environment sub-profiles, the sub-panels will combine 'overview' and 'research strategy', and will assess the environment template sections as four components of equal weighting, (taking account of the environment data as stated in paragraph 90):

- overview and research strategy

- people (staffing strategy and staff development; and research students)

- income, infrastructure and facilities

- collaboration and contribution to the discipline or research base.