Section D4: Assessment criteria: environment

Environment template

106. The main panel believes that excellent research can be undertaken in a wide variety of research structures and environments, and that the health of the disciplines represented within Main Panel D is well served by that variety. 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 the basis on which it has been presented as appropriate to the work of the organisation.

107. In this context, sub-panels will assess the vitality and sustainability of the submitting unit and its contribution to vitality and sustainability of its discipline. Sub-panels recognise that the health of the disciplines requires appropriate infrastructures and activity at HEI level to maintain and develop individuals and groups of researchers, and to train new generations of researchers.

108. Given that there is no expectation that the environment element of submissions relates to a single coherent organisational unit, submissions should explain any distinct groups or units covered, particularly where discrete organisational units form part of a single submission.

109. The following specific information is requested in the five sections of the environment template:

a. **Overview**: This section should briefly describe the organisation and structure of the submitting unit, to set the context for sub-panels assessing the submission. This section will not be assessed. Note that there is no expectation that this section needs to refer to a single 'department' or coherent organisational unit.

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

- Where relevant, the submitting unit's position with reference to research plans described in RAE 2008, including reasons for any significant change of direction/strategy or profile.

- The submitting unit's plans and aspirations for developing its research over the next five years (2014 to 2019), having due regard to sustainability and the wider research context, and including how these plans and aspirations

will be realised. This should cover the areas outlined by sections c to e below.

- Support for interdisciplinary and collaborative research (where appropriate).

c. **People**:

i. **Staffing strategy and staff development**: This may include (but is not limited to):

- Staff development strategy, for all staff pursuing a career in research (including research assistants and postdoctoral researchers), at all stages of their careers, including the use of mentoring, probation and appraisal and training, and the unit's implementation of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.

- Evidence of how individuals at the beginning of their research careers are being supported and integrated into the research culture of the submitting unit, such as through lighter loads for early career researchers.

- The policy for research leave/sabbatical leave, for all staff at all stages of their careers (including fixed-term and part-time staff).

- Clear procedures for career progression of staff at all stages of their careers (including fixed-term staff and part-time staff).

- The contribution of post-doctoral researchers to the unit (where appropriate, the size and type of submitting unit will be taken into account when considering such information).

- Evidence of commitment to equal opportunities in the recruitment and support of research staff; as well as evidence of the submitting unit's strategies, activities and collaborations that support diversity and enable staff drawn from a wide cross-section of society to engage in research.

- Evidence of procedures to stimulate and facilitate exchanges between academia and business, industry or public or third sector bodies, for example, through the recruitment or secondment of research staff.

ii. **Research students**: This may include (but is not limited to):

- Evidence of the development of a research culture into which research students are

fully integrated and are prepared for further research activity.

- Strong recruitment of doctoral research students and evidence of studentships from major funding bodies (for example, RCUK), although sub-panels recognise the challenges of recruiting doctoral students in the current funding environment.

- Evidence of support for equal opportunities in the recruitment and support of research students.

- Evidence of procedures to stimulate and facilitate exchanges between academia and business, industry or public and third sector bodies, for example, through the recruitment or secondment of research students.

- Details of monitoring and support mechanisms linked to evidence of progress and of successful completions.

- Details of the support provided to research students in terms of skills development and preparation for their future career.

d. **Income, infrastructure and facilities**: This may include (but is not limited to):

- Evidence of the successful generation of research income – although allowance will be made for disciplines that find it more difficult to attract research funding because of the nature of the research, and where more early career researchers are involved. In particular submissions should detail funding that has been received through sources not reported in Higher Education Statistics Agency returns, such as commissions from artistic organisations.

- Scholarly infrastructure supporting research – including significant archives and collections, with a description of their development and use.

- Organisational infrastructure supporting research, for example, evidence of areas where there has been significant investment, or through the development of research clusters that focus on distinctive areas of work.

- Operational infrastructure supporting research within the submitting unit (and, **where relevant**, within the institution more widely) including technical and support staff as well as estate and facilities; advanced equipment; or IT resources.

- The strategy by which an appropriate balance between the scholarly, organisational and operational infrastructures is established, and by which these elements are prioritised and maintained.

e. Collaboration and contribution to the discipline or research base: This may include (but is not limited to) collaborative arrangements, partnerships, networks and joint research projects with academic colleagues in other institutions, locally, nationally and internationally, including where these arrangements are interdisciplinary; membership of Research Council or similar national and international committees; involvement on university research advisory panels, or national/international research strategy or review boards; leading positions in professional subject associations and learned societies; editorial positions; examination of doctorates; organisation of conferences and scholarly encounters; refereeing academic publications or research proposals; HEI consultancies; scholarly awards or fellowships; invited keynotes, lectures and/or performances.

Environment data

110.   'Guidance on submissions' (Part 3, Section 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).

111.   Both doctoral degrees awarded and research income data will be considered in the context of the narrative provided in the REF5 template, and taking account of the size of the submitting unit, its areas of specialism, its research groups, research strategy and different levels of research funding available in different fields.

112.   The sub-panels do not require these data to be presented by research group, and this information should not be provided.

Environment criteria

113.   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**: The extent to which the research environment supports a research culture characterised by intellectual vigour, innovation and positive contribution within the discipline(s) and profession.

- **Sustainability**: The extent to which the research environment ensures the future health and well-being of the unit and the discipline(s).

114.   In assessing the environment element of submissions, sub-panels will apply the criteria in terms of both the research environment within the submitting unit, and its participation in and contribution to the discipline and profession. References to contributions outwith the discipline/profession do not refer to material more properly considered within the impact template, but to research-focused activity.

115.   In forming the environment sub-profiles, the sub-panels will attach equal weight to each of the following five components of the environment template, taking account of the environment data as stated in paragraphs 110-111:

- research strategy
- people: staffing strategy and staff development
- people: research students
- income, infrastructure and facilities
- collaboration and contribution to the discipline or research base.