

UK DEANS OF SCIENCE
RESPONSE TO REF 2014 CONSULTATION ON DRAFT PANEL CRITERIA AND WORKING
METHODS
OCTOBER 2011

Generic questions

1a

Overall draft panel criteria and working methods

The generic and four main panel statements achieve an appropriate balance between consistency across the exercise and allowing for justifiable differences between the four main panels.

Disagree

1b

Are there particular aspects of the criteria and working methods that should be more consistent across all the main panels? Are there differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria? Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). UK Deans of Science will only comment on a relatively small number of issues that relate to the disciplines/sub-panels within Main Panels A and B. However, we wish to compliment those involved in drawing up the proposals in trying to take account of so many issues raised by respondents to previous consultations.

We remain unconvinced of the validity of the argument, predominantly from the humanities, that has led to a downgrading of the use of citations.

The issue of co-authorship is problematic and it is essential that an understanding is achieved in relation to the extent of contribution by various co-authors. This is a particular issue for sub-panels under Main Panels A and B as many publications involve significant numbers of authors who will not all have contributed equally to the publication. Panel A requires a co-author to have made 'a material contribution' to the output while Panel B expects 'a substantial contribution'. This difference is concerning in itself but, as with other areas of inconsistency, creates particular problems for inter- and multi-disciplinary work.

There is also a possibility that the differing amounts of information on the criteria for submission of outputs by different sub-panels could make submissions difficult to prepare (particularly if a submission has overlap with panels that have differing requirements) and the final results more difficult to understand and justify. Greater consistency across panels concerning the amount of contextual information allowed would be desirable.

2a

Individual staff circumstances

The proposals for determining the number of outputs that may be reduced without penalty, for staff with a range of individual circumstances, are appropriate (Part 1, Tables 2 and 3).

Disagree

2b

Please comment on these proposals. Respondents are also invited to comment specifically on:

- whether Tables 2 and 3 are set at appropriate levels
- the proposed options for taking account of pregnancy and maternity (Part 1, paragraph 62)
- whether a consistent approach across the exercise is appropriate, or whether there are any specific differences in the nature of research that justify differences in the approach between UOAs or main panels.

If commenting in respect of particular panels or disciplines, please state which.

The proposals for reduction in the numbers of outputs given in Table 2 are as appropriate as could be hoped.

There are many views on the issue of how to allow for maternity leave. We trust that the application of allowances for this will be sensitive, giving neither too much nor too little, and acknowledging the extent to which pregnancy (and maternity leave) may have a different influence in different disciplines and even within a discipline. It has been suggested that the proposals as currently drafted may have the potential to mean that a researcher would not receive any relief from the number of outputs submitted unless she took the maximum period of maternity leave – which many of them cannot afford to do. We are very concerned at the fairness of this in addition to its potential effect on the continuous challenge of encouraging women into science. There is some concern about the extent to which personal medical information may have to be divulged especially in more complex cases. We wonder whether the consequences of this have been fully thought through and the extent of the difficulties that might arise. Further information is needed on the actual mechanisms by which complex circumstances will be evaluated and how the issue of confidentiality will be addressed in order that institutions can gather and supply appropriate evidence.

Whatever the challenges it is essential that panels manage this area with great care and sensitivity and produce fair and consistent outcomes.

Main panel A criteria and working methods

A3a

Main panel criteria and working methods

The main panel statement achieves an appropriate balance between consistency and allowing for discipline-based differences between the sub-panels.

Neither agree or disagree

A3b

Please comment on the balance between consistency and allowing for discipline-based differences between the sub-panels within this main panel. Please state the UOA(s) on which you are commenting.

Whilst we appreciate that this questionnaire has been designed here to channel commentary on the individual Main Panels we suggest that, given the potential for overlap of science across Panels A and B, the matter of consistency between these two panels, raised in comments above, is pertinent here.

A4a**Submissions and units of assessment (Section 1)**

Do the UOA descriptor and boundary statements provide a clear and appropriate description of the disciplines covered by the UOAs? Please include any suggestions for refining the descriptors and state which UOA(s) you are commenting on.

Yes

A4b

Please comment on the main panel's criteria in relation to multiple submissions in its UOAs.

No comment

A5a**Assessment criteria: outputs (Section 2)**

Overall, the main panel criteria relating to outputs are clear and appropriate.

Neither agree or disagree

A5b

Please comment on the criteria in Section 2, in particular on where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made.

We would refer back to our earlier comments.

A6a**Assessment criteria: impact (Section 3)**

Overall, the main panel's criteria relating to impact are appropriate and helpful to institutions in preparing submissions.

Agree

A6b

Please comment on the criteria in Section 3, in particular on where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made.

No further comment

A7a**Assessment criteria: environment (Section 4)**

Overall, the main panel criteria relating to environment are clear and appropriate.

Agree

A7b

Please comment on the criteria in Section 4, in particular on where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made.

No further comment

A8a**Working methods (Section 5)**

Overall, the working methods of the main panel and its sub-panels are clear and appropriate.

Neither agree or disagree**A8b**

Please comment on the working methods, in particular on where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made.

We would refer back to our earlier comments

Main panel B criteria and working methods

B3a**Main panel criteria and working methods**

The main panel statement achieves an appropriate balance between consistency and allowing for discipline-based differences between the sub-panels.

Neither agree or disagree**B3b**

Please comment on the balance between consistency and allowing for discipline-based differences between the sub-panels within this main panel. Please state the UOA(s) on which you are commenting.

Whilst we appreciate that this questionnaire has been designed here to channel commentary on the individual Main Panels we suggest that, given the potential for overlap of science across Panels A and B, the matter of consistency between these two panels, raised in comments above, is pertinent here.

B4a**Submissions and units of assessment (Section 1)**

Do the UOA descriptor and boundary statements provide a clear and appropriate description of the disciplines covered by the UOAs? Please include any suggestions for refining the descriptors and state which UOA(s) you are commenting on.

Yes

B4b

Please comment on the main panel's criteria in relation to multiple submissions in its UOAs.

No further comment

B5a**Assessment criteria: outputs (Section 2)**

Overall, the main panel criteria relating to outputs are clear and appropriate.

Neither agree or disagree**B5b**

Please comment on the criteria in Section 2, in particular on where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made.

We would refer back to earlier comments

B6a**Assessment criteria: impact (Section 3)**

Overall, the main panel's criteria relating to impact are appropriate and helpful to institutions in preparing submissions.

Agree

B6b

Please comment on the criteria in Section 3, in particular on where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made.

No further comment

B7a

Assessment criteria: environment (Section 4)

Overall, the main panel criteria relating to environment are clear and appropriate.

Agree

B7b

Please comment on the criteria in Section 4, in particular on where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made.

No further comment

B8a

Working methods (Section 5)

Overall, the working methods of the main panel and its sub-panels are clear and appropriate.

Neither agree or disagree

B8b

Please comment on the working methods, in particular on where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made.

We would refer back to earlier comments