



Printable summary of your responses

Name : Ian Carter

Position : Director of Research and Enterprise

Institution/organisation : University of Sussex

Email : i.carter@sussex.ac.uk

Responding as : Higher education institution (HEI)

Address : Sussex House, Falmer

Town : Brighton

County : Sussex

Postcode : BN1 9RH

05/09/2011 13:31:00

Your responses

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.

Agree

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).

There are a number of areas of wording that vary unnecessarily between the Main Panels. Whilst this may not matter for a single submission, the variations might introduce variable responses across an institution, and hence affect consistency. In particular, we recommend that there is consistency in any procedural elements, as opposed to necessary subject variations.

We believe that there should be greater consistency in requirement for and specific length of additional information in relation to outputs.

We believe that there should be greater consistency in the definitions of reach and significance.

With respect to some sub-panels' desire for disaggregated data, such as PGRs registered, we would wish the Panels to be clearer as to the reasoning for this, and clarity on how this data will be used. In the case of PGR registrations, it is clear that completion rates cannot be computed from the information provided, and hence we would not expect the sub-panels to be attempting to do so. The provision of additional data also raises burden issues.

We also feel that there should be greater consistency between the Panels' working methods.

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.

We welcome the attempts made to standardise the approach to individual staff circumstances and to provide for reductions in required outputs. However, we have two substantial concerns about the details of the proposed approach: one in relation to maternity leave; and one in relation to complex circumstances.

i) Maternity Leave

We are concerned that the proposed approach for maternity (and related) leave introduces two inappropriate and undesirable features. Our primary concern is the setting of 14 months as the minimum "absence" before a reduction in outputs is allowed. This presumes that for periods less than this, a woman's research would not have been interrupted in a meaningful way. This period of time is very rarely taken for a single pregnancy. The typical maximum time allowed by an employer is 12 months, but the more typical time actually taken is six to nine months. In the latter case, using a six month figure, it would require a woman to have three pregnancies in the REF period in order to qualify for a reduction of one output, and five pregnancies to have a reduction of two outputs. This makes a nonsense of what is otherwise a well-intentioned mechanism.

To set this further in context, and using Sussex as a typical example, women are able to take 18 weeks at full pay, 21 weeks at statutory maternity pay and 13 weeks unpaid. There are therefore financial pressures on individuals to minimise maternity periods, which again mitigates against the accumulation of the required "absence" time. If someone wished to remain on full pay, they would have to have four periods of maternity leave to qualify for a reduction of one output.

The alternative option of using complex circumstances opens a different set of risks, as indicated below in terms of certainty, but also does not recognise that the need to adjust

working patterns after a return from maternity leave is normal, and not exceptional, as is suggested.

There is a clear danger that the proposals would push women to take shorter maternity leaves, or to work during their leaves, which would be detrimental to their families and contravene their maternity rights. This pressure would have been even greater had these proposals been published at the beginning of the REF period. The REF processes should not directly affect the personal decisions made by individuals.

The alternative option of using “complex circumstances” is equally unsatisfactory. As noted below, this leaves the position uncertain and out of the control of the individual and the institution, and could lead to variations in practice (just what these measures are intended to avoid) or inappropriate treatment of women. Furthermore, it encourages pregnancy and maternity to be considered as a problematic medical condition.

In practice, women with three excellent items who have had a period of maternity leave might either be left out or they will be submitted with a fourth weaker item. In both cases they risk their research as being judged sub-optimally.

We recommend that the Funding Bodies consider adopting either a standard “absence” period per maternity leave, regardless of the length of time actually taken, or to allow the reduction of the number of outputs by one for each discrete period of maternity leave taken. These suggestions are similar to the approach taken by the European Research Council, which allows 18 months per pregnancy. This approach recognises in a more realistic way the potential impact on an academic career of becoming a mother.

Whilst these comments have concentrated on maternity leave, there will be parallel issues in relation to other parental or adoptive leave.

ii) Complex Circumstances

Our reading of the criteria is that the treatment of complex circumstances have less certainty than for clearly defined circumstances. Whilst this is to be expected in one respect, the current proposals leave institutions, and hence individuals, unduly exposed. Paragraph 58 of the generic statement indicates that the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel (EDAP) will consider all complex cases, and make recommendations to the main panel chairs for their decision. This will take place after submissions have been made, and hence institutions will be taking the risk that their assumed reduction in outputs will be agreed. This has the potential to make institutions more conservative in their judgements of complex circumstances, and hence potentially to take a more negative view of an individual’s position than ought to be the case.

We recommend that the Funding Bodies create a mechanism in which individuals in complex circumstances are not exposed in this way. For example, decisions by EDAP and the Main Panels before submissions are made, and / or the ability to include reserve outputs (as for double-weighted outputs in some subjects). The former is preferable, as it gives certainty of treatment, although it may not always be practicable. The latter may still leave some individuals exposed, as they would be required to have produced sufficient outputs to be able to select a reserve, and the point of this mechanism is to recognise the reduction in output production.

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.

Agree

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.

-

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.

Agree

A4b

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

-

A5a

Assessment criteria: outputs (Section 2)

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

Agree

A5b

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

We note that requests for double-weighting are permitted, but reserve outputs are not. This effectively prevents the request being made.

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.

We remain concerned that the requirement for the underpinning research to be at least two star (paragraph 66), which is a subjective judgement of the panel at the time of the assessment, does not provide sufficient guidance to institutions in ensuring that they meet this requirement. Panel A does not include indications of two star quality in the way that Panel B does in paragraph 36 and Panel C in paragraph 89.

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.

-

A8a**Working methods (Section 5)**

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

Agree

A8b

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

-

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.

Agree

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.

-

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.

Agree

B4b

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

-

B5a

Assessment criteria: outputs (Section 2)

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

Agree

B5b

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

We note that requests for double-weighting are permitted, but reserve outputs are not. This effectively prevents the request being made.

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.

-

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.

-

B8a

Working methods (Section 5)

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

Agree

B8b

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

-

Main panel C criteria and working methods

C3a

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.

Agree

C3b

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.

-

C4a

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.

Agree

C4b

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

-

C5a

Assessment criteria: outputs (Section 2)

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

Agree

C5b

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

In response to paragraph 44, examples include preliminary findings or technical

documentation that were made available through grey literature or a limited audience, which are then developed and published through more formal and reviewed routes.

We note that requests for double-weighting are permitted, but reserve outputs are not. This effectively prevents the request being made.

C6a**Assessment criteria: impact (Section 3)**

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

Neither agree or disagree

C6b

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

The types and examples of impact and evidence are not as fully developed as those presented in Panels A, B and D, which gives the impression of the Panel not being as engaged in this area of the assessment process, and hence potentially disadvantaging the submissions in this area.

C7a**Assessment criteria: environment (Section 4)**

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

Agree

C7b

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

-

C8a**Working methods (Section 5)**

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

Agree

C8b

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

-

Main panel D criteria and working methods**D3a****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.

Agree

D3b

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.

-

D4a

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.

Agree

D4b

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

-

D5a

Assessment criteria: outputs (Section 2)

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

Agree

D5b

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

-

D6a

Assessment criteria: impact (Section 3)

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

Agree

D6b

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

We recommend that paragraph 81 is developed further, so that institutions are guided more precisely as to the Panel's view on two star quality. Panel B (paragraph 36) and Panel C (paragraph 89) have fuller information in this area, which may be helpfully reused.

D7a**Assessment criteria: environment (Section 4)**

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

Agree

D7b

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

-

D8a**Working methods (Section 5)**

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

Agree

D8b

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

-

[Return to consultation](#)