

Interdisciplinary research outputs: assessment protocol

Definition of interdisciplinary research in the REF

For the purposes of the REF, interdisciplinary research (IDR) is understood to achieve outcomes (including new approaches) that could not be achieved within the framework of a single discipline. Interdisciplinary research features significant interaction between two or more disciplines and/or moves beyond established disciplinary foundations in applying or integrating research approaches from other disciplines.

Additional guidance for assessing IDR outputs

- a. In applying the criteria of originality and significance to assess IDR outputs, the sub-panels will take into account that the criteria do not need to be demonstrated across all of the constituent parts brought together in the work, but may be identified in one or more parts, or in their integration.

- b. All elements of the research should demonstrate appropriate academic rigour with a clear rationale for their application to the question posed by the research.

Main Panel IDR Leads

These are main panel members with specific responsibility for advising on and ensuring consistency in the application of the criteria and procedures relating to the assessment of interdisciplinary research. These IDR members will be members of IDAP.

IDR advisers

IDR advisers are sub-panel members with a specific role in offering guidance to the sub-panels on, and participating in, the assessment of IDR outputs. Each sub-panel will have at least two IDR advisers.

IDR network

The IDR advisers will work in a network with their counterparts on other sub-panels (across all four main panels), meeting at key points during the assessment phase to share good practice, support consistency of approach in implementing the IDR measures, and discuss both specific and any general assessment issues.

Assessment of outputs identified as interdisciplinary

1. Each sub-panel will hold a calibration exercise for outputs, which will include IDR outputs. All sub-panel members and output assessors will participate in the exercise. Panel chairs (and deputy-chairs, as appropriate) will consult with IDR advisers as required on the selection of IDR outputs for calibration.

2. For each IDR output, the sub-panel, acting with advice as required from its IDR advisers, will decide whether there is sufficient expertise within the sub-panel to reach a robust judgement of each IDR output.

3. Where there is sufficient expertise within the sub-panel, the IDR output will be assessed within the sub-panel, drawing on the additional guidance for assessing IDR outputs (as repeated above). Panel chairs (and deputy-chairs, as appropriate) will consult with IDR advisers as required on the allocations. It is expected that the majority of IDR outputs will be assessed within the sub-panel.

4. Where the sub-panel identifies the need for additional expertise from another sub-panel to assess the output in full, the IDR output may be referred for joint assessment (paragraphs 5-6), or where the sub-panel considers it does not have the required expertise, the output may be cross referred (paragraph 7). In both of these approaches, the original sub-panel will retain responsibility for recommending the quality profile for all IDR work that was submitted in its UOA.

5. Where the sub-panel considers that it has some of the relevant expertise, but not sufficient expertise to assess the IDR output in full, it will undertake a joint assessment with other relevant sub-panels (including both within and across main panels). Panel chairs (and deputy-chairs, as appropriate) will consult with IDR advisers as required on the allocations for joint assessment.

6. Where joint assessment is undertaken, an output will be allocated to panellists both on the original and the other sub-panel(s) involved. The allocated panellists (from both sub-panels involved) will work together as required, to provide a recommendation to the original sub-panel, drawing on the additional guidance for assessing IDR outputs.

7. In accordance with the working methods of the sub-panels, in cases where a sub-panel considers it does not have the required expertise to assess specific parts of submissions (including an IDR output), it may cross-refer those parts of submissions to another sub-panel for advice in accordance with the wider cross-referral process described in the 'Panel criteria'. Panel chairs (and deputy-chairs, as appropriate) will consult with IDR advisers as required on the cross-referral of IDR outputs.

8. As set out in the 'Panel criteria and working methods', outputs flagged as interdisciplinary will be assessed on a fair and equal basis and will be neither advantaged nor disadvantaged in the assessment. Sub-panels may identify outputs as interdisciplinary that have not been flagged as such by the submitting HEI, to enable consideration of the most appropriate means of assessing the output. Additionally, there will be no disadvantage in the assessment where a sub-panel considers that a flagged output does not meet the definition of interdisciplinary research and the output will be assessed on a fair and equal basis with other submitted outputs.

9. IDR advisers will engage across the panels through the IDR network, to share good practice and support consistency of approach. The sub-panels' approach to assessing IDR outputs will be discussed regularly at main panel meetings, with further advice and guidance to be provided by IDAP.

10. The quantitative analysis that will be undertaken after the exercise on the volume and assessment of IDR outputs will be based upon IDR outputs as identified by submitting institutions.