**Briefing Note for UK Universities from the UK Council of Area Studies Associations regarding REF2021**

In a post-Brexit 'Global Britain', a deep knowledge and understanding of other countries, regions and peoples of the world will attain heightened levels of strategic importance for all sectors of the UK economy and all parts of society. The work of Area Studies departments across the breadth of the UK’s Higher Education sector will form a key component of our collective response to the challenges that UK society will face in this regard. As part of this response, the UK Council of Area Studies Associations [UKCASA] would like to encourage as many universities as possible to submit their area- and region-focused research to UoA25 Area Studies in REF2021. This Unit of Assessment offers anumber of key features which are attentive to the disciplinary, conceptual and methodological challenges of area-based work.

1. Interdisciplinarity.

Interdisciplinarity has taken on increased importance for REF2021. All the sub-panels will have an interdisciplinarity 'champion' and have been encouraged to welcome interdisciplinary work. With its focus on understanding a country or region, Area Studies draws on relevant disciplines and methodologies from both the humanities and social sciences for understanding the country, region or issue under study. As such, it is by its very nature both multi- and inter- disciplinary and furthermore encouraging of trans- disciplinary initiatives that explore creative ways of working across disciplinary boundaries. The world is made up of a mosaic of peoples and communities, each characterised by a complex relationship to local milieu and diverse – and changing – links to regional and global processes. Area Studies, with its wide embrace of disciplinary specialisms in addition to multi-and inter-disciplinary approaches, is well placed to explore such diversity.

The Area Studies UoA thus actively encourages the submission not only of multi- and inter- disciplinary work, but also of innovative, 'risk-taking' trans-disciplinary work.

1. Innovation.

Area Studies promotes innovative approaches to contemporary/historical foci - working across disciplinary and sectoral boundaries - and embraces innovative output. It is not just tolerant of, but actively encourages, and seeks to reward, innovation and excellence in both traditional and non-traditional formats.

1. Coherence

The Area Studies UoA facilitates and encourages a coherent intellectual submission from multi- and inter-disciplinary departments, as well as from research clusters that draw in staff from several different departments. The Area Studies UoA takes a broad view of what constitutes area studies, which includes, but is not limited to: political, social, anthropological and historical studies; language studies (including translation and discourse analysis); literature, culture and thought; film and media studies; visual cultures; postcolonial studies; indigeneity; and thematic work (e.g. gender, migration studies).

1. Impact

Area Studies colleagues typically possess extensive networks in the countries/regions in which they work and collaborate with local people, institutions and organisations. Engagement with non-academic communities can take many forms and may incorporate local-level activism through to national-level policy advocacy. The increased significance of the Impact Case Study (the importance of which has increased to 25% of the Grade Point Average in REF2021) within the REF framework means that there are considerable benefits to be derived from allowing Area Studies units to develop and submit such activity in a coherent manner. Moreover, the impact agenda in Area Studies, which often has an international focus, presents particular challenges. The Area Studies sub-panel is sensitive to this specificity.

1. Visibility of Area Studies

Within the humanities and social sciences, Area Studies has a strong track-record of attracting external research funding. The opportunities for such funding have increased in recent years with the creation of the DfID/ESRC Global Challenges Research Fund. The sustainability of such funding successes depends on maintaining the visibility and profile of area studies research within UKRI through the REF.

In conclusion, the health and vitality of Area Studies will be essential to the UK’s success in confronting rapidly evolving global challenges. UKCASA thus encourages universities to submit area studies research to the Area Studies sub-panel. We are confident that the sub-panel will recognise excellence wherever it is found and in whatever form - be it outputs, impact and environment - whilst also acknowledging that excellent research is not determined by the type of publication, or the language, in which it appears.