

Reply to Hefce on Joint Funding Bodies Review of Research Assessment

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Because of the special nature of this institution as a University College, aspiring to full University status, we have decided to address those questions which have special relevance for this College and related institutions which are striving to establish a strong research base.

With reference to your Annexe B (Notes for Facilitators):

Group 1: Expert Review

We would prefer the well-tried Expert Review by peers rather than the algorithmic proposal (**Group 2**). The algorithmic approach would provide a blunt instrument which would fail to take into account the finer details relating to the overall scholarly profile and potential of individual departments and groups. Even for older and established research-based universities, a simplistic counting up of research income and research student numbers can never adequately reflect the true research capability and potential of any institution. **The algorithmic approach will be especially disadvantageous to university colleges and all the newer universities where research ought to be measured on a true assessment of potential as much as on hard statistics.**

The RAE 2001, insofar as it constituted a peer review incorporating additional expertise when needed, would seem to offer the fairest approach.

RAE 2001 did not, however, achieve an outcome which was fair overall, because new Universities and University Colleges aspiring to full University status were assessed on exactly the same terms as older, better-funded and longer-established institutions. A banding system has to be devised whereby the newest institutions are not graded on exactly the same criteria as more established Universities. Your suggestion in **Annexe B, Group 1, Section 5** that the newest institutions should be assessed on a combination of teaching excellence and research has much to recommend it. We would add to that the possibility of assessing research potential based on solid research proposals from the newest institutions – proposals elicited by the Research Assessment body (in whatever form that takes in future). It is

eminently possible to assess such research proposals on the basis of previous track record, present resources and necessary realistic future funding for research projects. The assessment, therefore, should be prospective and retrospective, as in previous RAEs, but separate criteria ought to be applied to the newest Universities and University Colleges. An evaluation of the teaching excellence dimension would also help to support the notion of equality of treatment for all groups of staff in Higher Education. That is not to encourage a 'teaching-only' cohort within institutions, but rather to encourage those who are actively striving to incorporate a serious research dimension into their teaching. The outcomes of a research assessment exercise should enhance the development of both teaching and research in higher education. Wherever possible the assessment should reward institutions, which connect research and teaching to the benefit of both. Teaching quality and the quality of connections between research and teaching should be part of any research assessment.

In order to provide a measure of fairness in the assessment process institutions have to be judged on what they achieve and how they are developing, *with the resources currently available to support research*. In this respect institutions would be measured on the *same criteria*, though these would be more sophisticated than simple measures of quality and quantity of research.

When we are asked 'Should the funding councils be more explicit {beforehand} about what the information produced by the exercise means, and what it ought to be used for', the answer has to be a resounding 'Yes'. Not only were our newer institutions assessed in precisely the same way as the longer-established universities, but the decision by Hefce not to fund grades below 3a and to reduce funding on some of the grades above, added special discomfort for the newer institutions. That special discomfort only emerged by way of a postscript to the long and arduous exercise.