

Joint Funding Bodies' Review of Research Assessment Response from Chester College of Higher Education

The College is of the opinion that a form of research assessment broadly similar to that of the Research Assessment Exercise should continue as the basis for the distribution of research funding. However there are three specific points that the College believes it is important should be addressed in the review.

Firstly, the review should address the need for a transparent link between the metrics and the funding model. The College believes that the implications of the metrics/funding model and thresholds should also be transparent before submissions are made to any assessment exercise. Inadequate modelling of the outcome of 2001 and the funding implications meant that HEFCE were unable to fulfil their wish, indicated before the assessment, to fund units rated 3b. It is also important that the definition of scores be clarified. For example, in 2001 the distinction in criteria between 3a and 3b ratings is slight and ambiguous (it is possible to achieve some evidence of international excellence whilst not meeting the two-thirds measure of national excellence), and yet for HEFCE, this is the threshold for QR funding.

Secondly, that 'critical mass' should not be a criterion for quality in any subject: for subjects where this is perceived as a significant factor, the influence of 'critical mass' will be manifested in the quality of research outputs. Thus it is unnecessary, and unfair, to allow this factor to effectively count twice in the assessment of quality. It does not follow that small departments, which may lack the range of equipment found in larger departments, would necessarily produce lower quality research. Indeed, they often need to define their research interests carefully to focus on a particular topic.

Finally, that any form of self-assessment would place an unfair burden on institutions that have previously received relatively weak RAE scores. They would almost certainly feel the need to bring in expertise from outside of the institution to give credibility to their assessment.