

**Joint  
Funding Bodies Review of Research Assessment Consultation paper.  
Courtauld Institute of Art**

The RAE provides a means of accountability, which is clearly necessary, but as it is currently structured it has at least three serious drawbacks.

1. In any successful research department (at least in the humanities and social sciences and I suspect also in the sciences) there is an intimate dialogue between teaching and research. This should be reflected in and encouraged by the exercise, whereas the current structure stresses research at the expense of teaching.
2. The RAE tends to make departments aim at or even plan for 'getting a 4/5/etc', which does not contribute to formulating a proper research strategy. On the contrary it encourages distorted patterns of hiring, as where a star is bought in for the sole purpose of improving chances in the RAE. It is difficult to square this possibility with responsible staff development.
3. There is a significant disparity between panels in a number of respects, which weakens the acceptability of the exercise.

Other points:

Setting up the Panel

- The sizes of panels should be consistent with the number of units submitting.
- Criteria for membership of panels should be published and should as far as possible be the same for all panels.

Clarity of ground rules

- The categories 'international', 'national' and 'sub-national' confuse two entirely different things, quality on the one hand (which should be absolute and which is what is being aimed at) and notions of geography and influence (thus international means more influential than national or regional, which is at least misleading). Terms such as 'excellent', 'good' and 'poor' would be clearer.
  - The proportion of read to unread material should be consistent across panels. Where less than 100% of work submitted is read, it should be made clear that the unread part constitutes a representation of research and not an evaluation.
  - All possible steps should be taken to reduce the extent of manipulation of submissions by departments. The following are two such steps.
    1. If the system remains the same and departments can choose who to submit, then the results should be expressed as a single symbol combining the grade and the proportion submitted. However much HEFCE requires institutions to mention the two together the culture still refers only to the grade. Thus it is exclaimed, for example, that institution A got a 4 whereas B only achieved a 3b, despite the fact that A has submitted only 20% of their staff and B 100%. With a combined result their relative positions would be reversed, and something more like the research cultures of the departments revealed.
    2. Alternatively the system could be changed to require every department to submit all of its staff. This is still open to manipulation especially by universities with college systems, but the dangers could be minimised by the threat of checks on the administrative reality of the claimed units.
  - This second alternative has the major advantage of establishing the link between teaching and research which lies at the heart of a research environment.
  - The criteria used by panels should be more consistent, with variations only where the subject area requires them (e.g. the importance or otherwise of curating exhibitions).
  - Our panel should make as clear as possible their acceptance of the importance of the preparation of exhibitions. The same applies to editorial work, which contributes significantly to the life of the sector.
  - The panel should also make clear the criteria for conservation.
- Panels should also make clear their acceptance of the fact that recent entrants to the profession will have different profiles from those who have been working for many years. This point is related to the problem of years-long projects, which can easily and unjustifiably distort RAE returns. It might suggest increasing the time between exercises, though that has unwelcome implications for the development of weaker departments.

Results

- Equity between panels is a key requirement. While it is impossible to achieve complete consistency, more should be done to monitor and compare the working methods of different panels.
- The exercise should attempt an absolute assessment of the quality of the research. It should not seek to establish relative judgements which take into account the disadvantages faced by a department, whether of geography, finance or something else.

### Feedback

--Comments were too bland. There are obviously legal reasons for this blandness, but these should be examined and if possible confronted. On the other hand, comments should definitely not deal with individuals in the submission.