

**Joint funding bodies' review of research assessment.
The following comments are made on behalf of Corus plc.**

The RAE must change. It has achieved what it set out to achieve in terms of improving quality and concentrating funding on the best. The current exercise is now on the flat part of the diminishing return curve. Academics know the game and play the rules to suit themselves, but not necessarily in a way that is healthy for the UK research and industry. The current assessment regime is far too narrow in its approach, concentrating as it does at the discipline level and on published papers. The Review Team is quite right to have concerns about its continued fitness for purpose, especially in relation to the need to properly recognise collaborations and partnerships across disciplines, institutions and with organisations, outside higher education ? especially industry. The need to recognise all aspects of excellence in research ? especially with regard to applicability and knowledge transfer and value to UK plc. Its effect on interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinarity. Innovation is normally a multidisciplinary activity and RAE should recognise this. RAE should inform funding agencies and also potential partners ? be they other HEIs or companies.

I support the introduction of a 'basket of measures' supplemented by an expert review, including an international perspective and also an assessment of the University's Strategy/Business Plan for those areas of research activity it wants to develop and the resources (people and infrastructure) it needs to achieve this. The assessment should overtly recognise the peer review of research quality of every grant application made to the Research Councils and to the post-completion evaluation at the end of each contract. Therefore, the assessment should be a combination of prospective and retrospective reviews. The assessment should be at the Research Group/Faculty level, as this has the potential of incorporating a multidisciplinary perspective. At department, group or individual level the assessment is too granular and at the HE institution level becomes too diffuse, although this could be realised through aggregation. The weakness of focusing at the Faculty level is that there is a danger of losing the Institution Strategy/Business Plan aspect which is vital. I would keep teaching and research assessment separate, as it will probably make more sense for some HEIs to concentrate on teaching. As far as metrics are concerned ? these should be identified as ones which drive the universities to the behaviours and actions to achieve quality that are desired/sought for at the national strategic level. Ideally, these measures should be synergistic and not incompatible with one another. Therefore, the selection of the metric criteria is critical. They should include bibliometric measures and external research income, research grant performance/achievements, invited papers/keynote speeches/reputation and overall impact of their research ? on other researchers, industry and other users (e.g. Government). I am not convinced that self assessment is objective enough given the financial consequences associated with the RAE findings. In my experience academics tend to overrate their own contributions and given the high stakes involved in RAE it is even more tempting for academics to overstate their strengths and understate their weaknesses. I support the new EPSRC policy of rewarding 'highly active, successful' research teams with a block grant for 5 years, but removing the opportunity to make any responsive mode grant applications in the next 3 years and so some measure of historical rating is acceptable, but if given too much weighting it will tend to fossilise research groups and will not embrace the need to include forward strategic developments.

I am not sure how a 'value for money' rating would be estimated. Funding should be directed at subjects as well as institutions. The International Visiting Panel that reviewed the EPSRC Materials Research programme earlier this year was particularly critical of the current RAE process, commenting:- "The Panel was discomfited if not appalled to discover that departments with UK universities are evaluate by a single number resulting from the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). While this system has simplicity, in the sense that one number attempts to characterise the quality of the research activities within a department, we believe it has failings that adversely affect the UK standing in materials research. The correlation between

the assessment and the government funding received by a department through a set formula diminishes the opportunities for novel and multidisciplinary research within the overall UK funding scene. Moreover, the inordinate amount of time consumed in preparing for the exercise detracts from more product devotion of time to research competitiveness. As expected, we found that much strategic manoeuvring is done to improve the RAE ranking. As soon as the evaluation is over, the manoeuvring starts to improve the rankings for the next evaluation. This of course leads to grade inflation (indeed, during the Panel's visit to the UK, the latest RAE was made public ? the number of 5* departments had increased from 170 to 284). The ramifications of a drop in grade (or indeed maintenance of an existing grade if lower than 5*) are serious. Such a grade deals a crippling financial blow to a department, from which it may never recover.

The Panel felt that the procedures for assigning grades in the materials science RAE, as they could understand them, were too imprecise to warrant such a discontinuity in funding.

In summary, dispense with the exercise, but if politics requires its survival as a funding vehicle, the bar to achieve the highest ranking should be raised. "See <http://www.epsrc.ac.uk> This is damning criticism of RAE. As far as some of your other questions is concerned I would make the following comments. - Group 5 section 18(d) - a mixture of these is my preference and should certainly include international comparisons. 18(i) Priorities - fair to individuals and institutions - resistant to game playing-minimally expensive.