

## **Joint Funding Bodies' Review of Research Assessment**

I am writing this response on the behalf of the Association of University Administrators (AUA) which represents many of those involved in management of, and administrative support for, the Research Assessment Exercise within Higher Education Institutions.

This response therefore concentrates on the administrative and managerial aspects of research assessment rather than addressing in detail the issues raised by each of the models of assessment identified in the report. It should be noted that whilst the administrative aspects of any assessment mechanism should not drive the process, there needs to be cognisance of the demands of different systems on all those involved and an appropriate view of cost-benefit analysis. The points which follow therefore highlight managerial and administrative concerns and issues which need to be addressed in any future assessment process.

There is a shared view amongst many administrative staff with responsibility for managing submissions to the RAE that it presents a considerable managerial challenge and administrative burden to both HE Institutions and the Funding Councils. Clearly to ensure that assessment is meaningful, any system will have an administrative cost but this should not be out of proportion to the benefits derived. It is likely that the true costs of participating in the RAE have been substantially under-estimated in the past and this should be considered when looking at alternative methodologies.

In relation to more specific points, there is a need for the technology used to support the assessment process to be robust and up-to-date. Consideration should be given to using internet technologies in future. Thought should also be given to using data already collected by statutory bodies e.g. through HESA and the Research Activity Survey (and its equivalents outside England) to support the research assessment process, thus avoiding duplication of data collection for the RAE.

Unnecessary bureaucracy should therefore be prevented where possible by streamlining the process and increasing transparency. In the last RAE there were unhelpful changes to the criteria and regulations at a very late stage. Although it is accepted that in some cases these will be unavoidable, more clarity earlier in the process would have been helpful.

Finally, the importance of an appropriately resourced administrative support function to oversee the research assessment process cannot be over-estimated. As a particular example, Institutions had to deal with large amounts of time-consuming requests for research outputs during the assessment process itself, over Summer 2001 when often academic colleagues were not available. This system was inordinately bureaucratic, unwieldy and at times absurd in its operation. It was not helpful to the assessment process.

This response is not intended to identify the benefits and costs of any of the systems proposed in the Review paper. Hopefully it has identified a number of the concerns felt by those responsible for the management and administration of the current process and has suggested a small number of improvements.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

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