BAAS

Following receipt of your letter of 7 October to Professor Philip Davies, Chairman of the British Association for American Studies (BAAS), the Development and Executive Committees of BAAS discussed HEFCE's invitation to contribute to the review of research assessment.

With approximately 500 members, BAAS is the scholarly body representing staff and postgraduate students in American Studies. Building on one-half century of growth and development, American Studies exists in 46 schools, departments and centres in British universities. American Studies combines work in history, literature, media studies, politics and related areas, and thus research in American Studies is best served by interdisciplinary assessment.

By definition, much research in American Studies is published in North America, and many British academics participate in North American research culture, as editors, reviewers, conference participants, grant and fellowship winners, and so forth. Accordingly, our evaluation of research often combines national and international standards and criteria.

With this in mind, the Executive Committee of the British Association for American Studies (BAAS) would like to recommend the following with regard to research assessment in American Studies.

1. Expert Review is our preferred method of assessment. We believe that assessment should be retrospective at the level of the subject/department, and outputs should be examined in direct relation to inputs. The number and quality of publications would be significant, but expert review would be able to gauge research success and excellence in both the British and American academic worlds of publications, grants and fellowships, and scholarly activity. Self-assessment may form a valuable part of an RAE submission, but should not be the primary form of assessment, and quantitative assessment of research output would not allow a realistic assessment of the nature and quality of research output.

2. We favour regular research assessment rather than a rolling assessment, preferably every 7-10 years, thus allowing for the length of time involved in research, writing and publishing major monographs. We believe that the enhancement and dissemination of knowledge could be given more prominence as one of the most significant criteria in evaluating humanities research output.

I hope that this is of use to you and your colleagues in your consideration of research assessment. We appreciate your invitation to contribute to this discussion, and will be delighted to be involved in the ongoing process.

Simon Newman
(Chair, Development Sub-Committee of BAAS)