

Joint Funding Bodies' Review of Research Assessment

Invitation to contribute

Response from LTSN Hospitality Leisure Sport and Tourism

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The LTSN for Hospitality Leisure Sport and Tourism relates to a range of subjects which should be viewed as a spectrum, with pure sport science within the natural sciences at one end, and leisure related subjects such as sports management, physical education, cultural studies, tourism or hospitality at varying stages towards the other.

Recent QAA Benchmarking and the establishment of an LTSN Subject Centre representing Hospitality Leisure Sport and Tourism is recognition of a cognate relationship between these subjects. This relationship should be recognised also in research assessment.

Within the process of research assessment, there is a need to create an environment which supports new research and researchers in emerging subject areas and rewards the quality of research in these areas. Hospitality leisure sport and tourism are becoming of increasing importance within the economic, social, cultural dimensions of UK life, and as such require the specific development of research and education infrastructure and activities. There is an inherent danger in the current model of funding because hospitality, leisure, sport and tourism are not clearly visible within the current subject classification. Insufficient funding has been allocated to these subjects, and this may potentially have had an impact on the curriculum, pedagogic development, and more importantly the viability of the subject provision.

Group 1: Expert Review

There is general support for the Expert Review method of research assessment. However, there is strong concern within the assessment of hospitality leisure sport and tourism research regarding the way in which these multi-disciplinary subjects are currently assessed, and the omission of more refined subject groupings within the current units of assessment. As hospitality leisure sport and tourism subjects generally have a primary disciplinary relationship, these subjects may have previously been submitted to single discipline panels under UoAs 35, 42, 34, 40, 43 or 65 in addition to UoA 69, depending upon the bias and strategic objectives of the originating departments and institutions. For example, tourism research may be submitted within UoA 69, when in fact there is no overriding logic for this.

This has negative impacts on the assessment and the development of research within the subjects. The lack of sufficient review panel members with knowledge of hospitality leisure sport and tourism subjects, (or indeed inter/multidisciplinary subjects) within specific units of assessment may inhibit the recognition of research within these subjects, or not give sufficient visibility to research within the subject area. Furthermore, multi-disciplinary journals are reported not to be viewed in the same standing as single disciplinary journals for RAE purposes.

Therefore hospitality leisure sport and tourism researchers may make decisions to submit papers to single disciplinary journals rather than subject journals, despite the growing number of high quality peer reviewed international subject journals which enjoy recognition within their subject communities.

If the current approach to Expert Review is retained, consideration should be given to the appropriate treatment of multidisciplinary research, the increasing amount of interdisciplinary research, and the selection of review panel members. The most equitable method of dealing with multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research as opposed to single discipline research is to ensure that subjects are not fragmented across several units, thus reducing their impact as viable and important independent areas of research.

Group 5 (c) What is Excellence in Research? and (h) How can a Research Assessment Process be Designed to Support Equality of Treatment for all Groups of Staff in Higher Education?

Enhancement of the teaching/research nexus is fundamental in terms of ensuring research assessment and the research activity itself contributes to quality teaching and learning within the disciplines. In order to ensure maximal contribution of HE research to the knowledge economy it is vital that subject research informs the curriculum, and in order to enhance capability for research, that the development of research skills in students is a central part of HE study.

The guiding principles outlined by Jenkins in his RAE review submission emphasise the need to consider research within the wider context of the goals of the entire HE system, and to recognise that the current research funding mechanism may not be effectively promoting the teaching /research nexus.

The 6th recommendation of Jenkins is that “The funding arrangements need to ensure that all staff are enabled to be scholars in their discipline and in the teaching of their discipline.” This scholarship in learning, teaching and research is the essence and spirit guiding the aims of LTSN Hospitality Leisure Sport and Tourism. Thus in order that the research base supports the learning of students, the production of high quality text books and learning materials within the subjects should be recognised as a vital and valid research activity.

In order that the views of all groups of staff are considered within this review, the committee may wish to consider how best to ensure that views are actively sought from participants in HE whose main commitment may not be to research, for example, by including those with a major responsibility for teaching.

The LTSN for Hospitality Leisure Sport and Tourism fully supports the submissions made by the Association of Tourism in Higher Education (ATHE), Professor Alan Jenkins (Oxford Brookes University and LTSN Generic Centre Advisor), and the Leisure Studies Association (LSA), and has also consulted with the Council for Hospitality Management Education (CHME).