

NAFAE Response to HEFCE on Research Assessment

Group 1 - Expert review

4 The main issue with Expert Review is the extent to which individuals can be expected to make judgements on the quality of a vast range of output types. Exhibitions of fine art (including photography) accounted for 1905 of the 2445 outputs coded to date (78%), from a total number of 3747 'exhibition' outputs. A total of 1281 individuals generated exhibition outputs that were seen in over 600 different venues. From the sample of 11 institutions surveyed so far, there would appear to be only a slight degree of correlation between output venue and grade achieved by the institution. Expert review of such numbers of outputs presented in a wide range of locations world wide presents particular difficulties.

5 There has long been an understanding of the importance for the fine art lecturer to be involved in their own practice or research, and of the added value this lends to the teaching context in our discipline. Combined assessment of teaching and research has the potential to give a good reflection of the quality of academic activity in fine art within UK HEI's

6 If the judgement of experts is to be retained as the cornerstone of research assessment, they would require specialist assistance in the development of robust data management tools that could address the particular needs of different UoA's.

7 a. Assessment might usefully combine a retrospective view with an element of weighting to recognise prospective intentions. This would then require an assessment of the extent to which targets were met at subsequent events.

7 b. Level of citations in a variety of media could usefully be incorporated, if the appropriate mechanisms were developed to track and retain this information for disciplines such as art and design. There are currently no such mechanisms to track the citations within the dominant documentary sources for art and design, as citations indices focus on academic journals. Much of the equivalent activity within art and design is carried out within other media such as broadsheets, TV and radio, popular arts magazines etc.

7 c. Given the relative infrequency of collaborative research activity within art and design, it would seem appropriate at this stage to be able to reflect the quality of individual contributions when considering assessment at departmental or institutional level.

7 d. It would seem appropriate that if the assessment were to be organised around subject groups that these should reflect groupings used for other purposes (eg UCAS). It might be appropriate to consider grouping subjects in relation to market sectors that make use of the research output in an attempt to deal with the problems of interdisciplinary work that sits across or between traditional disciplines. By identifying more specifically the stakeholders in the research activity of HEI's, a more considered view of appropriate experts and criteria may be developed.

7 e. Strength of subject/thematic approach is that it relates back to current academic courses and structures. Weakness is that courses are changing and that RA UoA's would have to respond to this.

Group 2 – Algorithm

8 would need to develop citations mechanism

9 Different UoA's might select from a listing of all possible metrics those that were most relevant for the discipline.

10 a. Yes in principle, if the data existed.

10 b. research grants made, funding received, research students registered, numbers completing, volume of research activity, numbers of delegates at conference, volume of sales of books, sales from exhibitions into publicly accessible collections, number of reviews (of book, of exhibitions etc), subscriptions/distributions of journals, word count of press coverage for exhibitions, citations

10 c. Not currently. The data is not being collated.

10 d. There are not enough existing metrics for fine art.

10 e. Transparency would be possible, although may increase the tendency to focus only on chasing certain venues or coverage.

Group 3 – Self Assessment

11 self assessment has to be enacted against criteria. This approach depends on the development of criteria that are recognised.

12 Advise generation of robust criteria model through broad consultation, with cognisance of vested interests of certain stakeholders.

13 a. Self assessments would need to cover appropriate criteria to provide evidence to support the assessment, with discussion of any interpretation

13 b. combination

13 c. combination of criteria agreed nationally, with additional criteria developed to address local specialisms

13 d. by sampling against nationally agreed criteria and expert witness

13 e. equally

13 f. Major strength is that it would enable institutions to fully engage with process of assessment. The big weakness is the potential for false claims requiring stringent policing.

Group 4 – Historical Weightings

14 Denies potential of research activity to grow. Particularly problematic for ‘young’ research disciplines like Fine Art

15 Distribution of excellence is people-dependent, but the ‘value-for-money’ rating is an attractive notion

16 a. Is it a proven assumption that the distribution of research strength changes slowly for all units or departments that might submit, irrespective of size?

16 b. Cannot establish baseline rating on evidence provided by 2001 RAE

16 c. Metrics that enable normal development to be projected could allow for identification of out-performance or under-achievement

16 d. closer tracking of achievement against target.

16 e. Establishes notion of working against an institutions own target, as opposed to competition with other institutions

Group 5 – Crosscutting themes

17 a. Assessment of the research base could be used to establish extent to which such activities contribute to economic activity, and to academic standing internationally

17 b. Every 7 years, either all at once or on a rolling basis

17 c. Excellence in research is different for different disciplines

17 d. Yes, but this should be against recognition at a national level of priorities that might range from stimulating activity in a discipline that contributes to cultural health to those that might impact significantly on global issues such as sustainability.

17 e. The question might be more usefully be phrased as should each subject/theme be assessed in the same way. The approach to each institution should be the same, but it might comprise different approaches within that.

17 f. Yes.

17 g. Institutions should be urged to give a true picture of research activity that does not include 'hiding' numbers of staff who are not research active.

17 h. By removing opportunities for institutions to gain advantage by inclusion/exclusion.

17 i. That it generates useful information that can be used for the basis of fair and equitable decisions

18 a. It would seem sensible to design a research assessment process that provides reliable management information for the academic communities, and that this interfaces with the work of the research councils.

18 b. every 7 years

18 c. RAE 2001 did not clearly capture different aspects of research activity for UoA 64. There is still evidence of two very different interpretations of what research is within the sector.

18 d. Different subjects have different funding needs. UoA 64 has only recently been able to access such funds and is still playing catch-up.

18 i. The three most important characteristics of any research assessment are to be informative, rigorous and flexible.