

Analysis of the responses to the Call for Evidence

Background

1. One of our main concerns when we began the review was to make sure that our deliberations were thoroughly informed by the views of stakeholders, both within and outside the HE sector. To identify these views, we launched our work with a Call for Evidence on 27 September 2002. The Call was sent to a wide range of bodies, including HE institutions, learned societies, major research charities and companies with interests in research and development. We also published an open invitation to contribute on the Review website, www.rareview.ac.uk, which solicited a large number of responses from individuals.

2. The Call for Evidence closed on 29 November 2002. Despite the short response period we received 414 responses, which we divided into four categories:

- a. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).
- b. Subject bodies, departments, faculties and learned societies.
- c. Individuals responding on their own behalf or on behalf of small groups of individuals.
- d. Stakeholders including sub-sectoral groupings such as the Russell Group and bodies outside the HE sector, including companies and charities.

3. To identify any marked preferences by subject or discipline, we subdivided categories b. and c. where possible into five sub-sections based on the umbrella Units of Assessment in the 2001 RAE: medical and biological sciences; physical sciences and engineering; social sciences; area studies and languages; and arts and humanities¹. The numbers of responses in each category are as follows:

		Responses	
HEIs			114
Subject bodies	Total		159
	Medical and biological sciences	37	
	Physical sciences and engineering	33	
	Social sciences	29	
	Area studies and languages	19	
	Arts and humanities	37	
Individuals	Total		88
	Medical and biological sciences	16	
	Physical sciences and engineering	16	
	Social sciences	15	
	Area studies and languages	1	

¹ In some cases it was not possible to determine a suitable umbrella group. Hence the total number of responses for subject bodies and individuals is higher than the sum of the constituent umbrella groups.

	Arts and humanities	11	
Stakeholders			53
Total			414

4. The Call asked respondents to respond to six different groups of questions. The first four groups invited them to identify a preferred mechanism for assessing research built from one or more of four components: expert or peer review; an algorithm based on metrics; self-assessment; and historical ratings. The fifth group invited comments on nine crosscutting issues, including whether each subject should be assessed in the same way and how research assessment could be designed to support equality of treatment for different groups of people in HE. Finally, the sixth section simply invited respondents to comment on any other issues they thought we should address.

5. Each response was read in detail for qualitative information responding to the six groups of questions outlined above. The frequency of different types of responses to particular questions was also recorded, enabling us to make some quantitative comparisons. In the following paragraphs we present the results of this analysis, taking each group of questions in turn. A summary of these findings appears in Annex E of the main report.

Expert review

There is overwhelming support for the continued use of expert review, organised around cognate areas of research, as the principal means of assessing UK research

- Of those responses that make a clear statement on the matter, at least two thirds in each category maintain that research assessment should be carried out **principally** by expert review.
- Support for expert review is particularly strong among HEIs and subject bodies. Among subject bodies, support is consistent across the five subject groups.
- A higher proportion of individuals and stakeholders do not state a clear preference. But among those that do, more than two thirds agree that expert review should be the principal means of assessing research.
- A significant proportion of responses in all categories also call for improvements in the consistency and transparency of the RAE expert review system, and also in its treatment of inter- and multi-disciplinary research.

6. Most support for expert review seems to flow quite simply from the perception that it is the only mechanism sophisticated enough to directly assess the quality of research, particularly when it is compared against the alternatives. It is the only process, in the words of the School of Modern Languages at the University of Southampton, "...that can take account of the full range of factors that should inform an assessment.", which include a range of often competing pressures for rigour, fairness, flexibility and others factors. Moreover the efficacy of expert review has been demonstrated repeatedly by the success of the RAE in delivering results widely perceived as accurate by the community. Supporters of expert review caution us not to interpret the controversy surrounding the 2001 RAE as an attack on the validity of expert review and a signal to discard it or diminish its role. According

to the University of Sussex, which is typical of the position, “Despite the fallout from RAE2001, the assessment process continues to be highly credible.”

7. Crucially the perception that expert review is the best available means of assessing research inspires confidence among the academic community, who are thus far more likely to accept the results of the exercise. The following extract from the University of Manchester is typical:

“In contrast with a number of other forms of cross-institutional review and assessment in the higher education sector, the RAE has retained a good degree of support amongst the academic staff who are its subjects. The University considers this favourable situation to be, in large part, due to the strength and widespread acceptability of expert peer review as the RAE’s core assessment methodology and would therefore strongly recommend that it remain the key component of any future mechanism.”

8. Strong support for expert review, however, does not indicate that the process as practised by the RAE is regarded as ideal. Most responses in all categories that support the maintenance of expert review also propose reform. These reforms revolve around three issues:

a. **Transparency.** There is strong support for the workings of the subject panels to be made more transparent in:

- i. The selection of panel Chairs and members (particularly among those who consider that particular disciplines and types of research are currently under-represented and under-rewarded);
- ii. The panels’ weighting of the various assessment criteria.
- iii. What proportion of the material submitted is actually read by panels.
- iv. The definition of international, national and sub-national standards of research excellence.

b. **Consistency.** There is also concerted support for the workings of the subject panels to be made more consistent with one another in the areas outlined in a. above. This appears to be driven mainly by perceptions that inconsistencies in the proportion of material read and the definition of international excellence in the 2001 RAE led to some panels being relatively sanguine in awarding top grades, while others were far more stringent. The Royal Statistical Society echoes these concerns, commenting that variance in the proportion of material read by each panel could lead in some cases to statistical anomalies and, in turn, flawed results.

c. **Inter-disciplinary research.** According to the Institute of Physics, which is typical of a number of responses, “Mechanisms must be developed explicitly to counteract the perception in the academic community that interdisciplinary research is not fairly treated.” The cross-referral process is generally regarded as capable in principle, but, like many other aspects of panel working, opaque and inconsistent in practice. Some argue that a reduction in the number of units of assessment (UoAs)

would help by reducing the area sometimes referred to as the unfunded “no mans land” between different UoAs, although this is by no means a consensus view.

9. There are two distinct schools of thought as to the kind of experts competent to assess research. Some argue strongly for orthodox peer review in which researchers are assessed by academics in the same field. Supporters of this style of review (including the British International Studies Association, the University of Birmingham and the Council of Deans of Arts and Humanities) maintain that the sense of ownership of the process by the academic community, which contributes so strongly to the respect discussed in paragraph 7, depends on academics, rather than individuals from outside HE, having the final say in panel judgements. Others, including the University of Leicester and the University of East London, suggest that non-academics and research users (including industrialists, business people and policy makers) ought to be given a greater role in order to test peer judgement and ensure that attention is given to extra-HE considerations. As we might expect, there is a strong correlation between those of the latter opinion and those supporting a broader definition of research than that prescribed by the RAE (see paragraphs 20 – 25). Some respondents even question the involvement of academics in assessing research at all. London Metropolitan University comments:

“Academics are not necessarily the best qualified to judge whether they are giving good value in their work to the government or the taxpayer/voter. Nor, rationally, are they necessarily in the best position to judge how funds should be used in support of research, unless one is prepared to accept that the production of good research, as *defined by those same academics* [italics in original], is the best use of funds. There is significant and serious danger of a self-fulfilling prophesy in such an argument, and many believe that this is precisely the position in which UK Higher Education now finds itself.”

10. Only five responses oppose the continued use of expert review. They include the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry, which suggests that the strong correlation between QR and peer-reviewed Research Council income obviates the need for a burdensome and expensive parallel peer review process run by the Funding Councils.

Algorithm based on metrics

Over half of all responses that express a clear preference agree that metrics should play a greater role in research assessment. However, a significant minority also opposes any extension to the use of metrics.

- Only 10 responses argue that metrics should be the principal means of assessing research.
- A much greater number agree that metrics should play a greater supporting role than at present. This is particularly the case among HEIs, where half of all responses (including those that do not express a clear preference) agree that metrics should be used to support the work of expert panels.

- Among stakeholders and subject bodies, of those making a clear statement, about half endorse the supporting use of metrics.
- An analysis of subject sub-divisions reveals much stronger support for metrics among subject bodies representing the medical and biological sciences and physical sciences and engineering, than those drawn from the social sciences and the arts and humanities.
- A significant minority of responses – almost a third of all institutions and subject bodies – opposes any extension of the use of metrics.

11. 10 responses – 4 from HEIs, 4 from individuals and 2 from subject bodies – argue that an algorithm based on metrics should predominate in assessing research. They fall broadly into two camps: first those that regard expert review as inherently inaccurate; and second those that share what is conveyed as a pragmatic desire to eliminate the costs and burden of expert review in the RAE (which they regard as an unnecessary duplication given the expert review carried out by other research funders) and focus on an efficient way to allocate QR. In other words, according to the Institute of Cancer Research:

“Any system [of research assessment] should focus on the primary purpose of QR – to provide the resources for the infrastructure that supports externally-commissioned research – which may not require a complex evaluation of all possible aspects of research.”

12. To most other respondents, however, a system wholly driven by metrics is unacceptable. They tend to see research assessment less as a mechanism to allocate funding and more as a means to accurately and sensitively assess and exhibit the quality of UK research. To them, metrics are far too crude to assess the quality of research (even in the hard sciences), and particularly to judge research culture and the strategy and vision required to attain research excellence. Opponents also argue that the sole use of metrics would:

- a. Distort UK research towards the counterproductive, short-term pursuit of largely irrelevant statistics (or what the Conference of Professors of Accounting and Finance calls the WYMIWYG phenomenon – “what you measure is what you get”).
- b. Preclude any prospective element in the assessment process.
- c. Favour established “mono-disciplines” at the expense of emerging, innovative and/or interdisciplinary research, particularly in HEIs without a track record of world-class research.
- d. Only offer an illusion of objectivity, since many of the metrics proposed in the Call for Evidence are constructed through a series of subjective judgements, and the weighting of these metrics within an algorithm the same.
- e. Rapidly undermine the small degree of credibility that existing metrics have managed to accrue. King’s College London comments, “...if ever the Government decides to rely on any particular statistical relationship as a basis for policy, then, as soon as it does that, that relationship will fall apart.”

13. Yet whilst there is very little support for the use of an algorithm to determine research quality, over half of responses expressing a clear preference agree that metrics should play

a greater supporting role within research assessment, as a means both to reduce burden and costs, and better inform (and compensate for the worst excesses of) subjective panel judgement. This is particularly the case among HEIs, where about half of all responses agree that metrics should be used to support the work of expert panels. According to the University of Surrey Roehampton, which is broadly typical of this position:

“Sole use of metrics would hardly remove subjective judgement, since subjective judgement will be required to select metrics and arrive at a balance among them. But a transparent use of some metrics can inform expert review and, if the weight given to them is explained to all stakeholders, build confidence in peer review.”

Among stakeholders and subject bodies, of those responses that show a preference about half also support this approach.

14. Unfortunately there is little consensus around precisely which metrics should be used to support research assessment. While the data shows modest support for bibliometrics, research income, expenditure/value for money and research student numbers, most responses expend far more effort warning us off these and other measures. Criticisms of the various metrics proposed include:

- a. Citations: risk of promoting mutual citation clubs; risk of rewarding an article that is cited frequently for correction; inconsistency among different disciplines. (However, a response from two individuals at Royal Holloway uses data from psychology to demonstrate that citations are in fact an accurate means of predicting past RAE grades and should be used in the future).
- b. Research income: privileges expensive “big” science; largely irrelevant for many arts and humanities disciplines; undermines the principles of the dual funding system (if it takes account of Research Council income); encourages profligacy; focuses on an input rather than an output; vulnerable to unexplained variations beyond the control of HEIs or the HE funders; drives up the quantity of research, thereby undermining the funders’ goal of sustainability.
- c. Reputation: big risk of corruption; far more subjective than expert review; “likely to favour the effective self-publicist over the bashful genius” (University of Sunderland).
- d. Bibliometrics: risk of increasing the power of the publishers; no established hierarchy whatsoever in the arts and humanities and social sciences; encourages further “salami slicing” of research dissemination at the expense of monographs.

It seems the only areas where respondents do agree on the use of metrics is that they should be **appropriate for each subject area** (with a range of different algorithms if required); **thoroughly tested** for the unintended promotion of undesirable results; and **made explicit to the community** well in advance of the exercise.

Self assessment

About half of the responses either do not mention self assessment or do not express a clear preference. Among those that do make a clear statement, about half think that self assessment should play a part in research assessment, while the other half oppose any extension.

- Support for self assessment is relatively strongest among stakeholders.
- Among the other three categories, and across the five subject sub-categories, there is an even split between advocates and opponents.

15. Support for self assessment seems to flow mainly from perceptions about the value of the process itself. While few advocates argue that self assessment is the perfect way to assess research, its apparent capacity to enable individual HEIs within a mature and diverse HE sector to plan, pursue and manifest research quality according to local conditions is regarded as the best way to increase research quality and capacity. (This is particularly the case among specialist HEIs and institutions with additional missions such as clinical training). In other words, supporters of self assessment tend to see research assessment as an iterative process with a goal of enhancing the research capacity of individual institutions and thus the HE sector generally (which is somewhat different way to many advocates of expert review and metrics). An individual respondent from the University of Nottingham observes:

“...the tempting footballing analogy should be resisted, because it is not the case of institutions seeking “promotion” or avoiding “relegation” within a single, scalar “league table,” but of institutions striving to better themselves within the context of their own, (partly) self-chosen and distinctive missions.”

16. Suggestions for how self assessment should be incorporated into the overall research assessment process vary among supporters. Some see self assessment forming the basis for an interim assessment between the “big bang” of expert review which would take place every 10 to 15 years, instead of 5 to 7 years as under the RAE. Others see self assessment comprising the first tier of a two tier assessment – light touch where a prima facie case for level ratings is claimed, more vigorous (perhaps by full blown expert review) where a HEI claims improvement or where deterioration is indicated by metrics. There is also a wide range of criteria and evidence suggested for self assessment, although most include the need to demonstrate more than just research quality by published outputs, and include prospective research plans, evidence of staff development, description of research culture and practices and interface with other core HE functions.

17. Self assessment also attracts support from respondents who see it as a means to cut down the workload of expert review panels and thus the overall administrative burden of the RAE. According to an individual respondent at the University of York, the RAE, “...is too expensive for such little change. Self assessment would short circuit this, putting the onus on departments who wanted to shift towards a greater research role to put in the effort to bid for it.” However, this view is by no means universal. Many of those responses that oppose any

extension of self assessment whatsoever (roughly half of those that express a preference), argue that self assessment would in fact lead to an increase in administrative burden, since all institutional assessments would need to be carefully audited by expert panels in order to maintain confidence in the system and discharge the funders' responsibility for probity in the use of public money. The University of Manchester comments:

“As research is largely designed to be a mechanism for resource allocation it would not be well-served by a self assessment model in which the incentive is to exaggerate the quality of the subject's own research. The ensuing lack of confidence in the results would have to be countered by a validation regime at least as onerous as the RAE.”

18. Other reservations about self assessment include:

- a. The risk of research assessment becoming a more adversarial and disputed process, in common with the experience of self assessment of teaching quality.
- b. Potential pre-occupation with the management of the research process rather than the academic merits and contribution of the research being generated. “Less research, more administration, monitoring and justification,” according to the University of Manchester School of Accounting and Finance.
- c. Possible descent into an assessment of the creative writing skills of self assessors, rather than the quality of the research itself. An individual respondent from the University of Plymouth sums up the position rather bluntly. Self assessment, he says, “...would raise bullshitting to even higher levels of improbability.”

Historical ratings

Fewer than 1 in 20 responses endorse any use of historical ratings whatsoever. Of the remainder about half oppose the use of historical ratings, while the rest do not make a clear statement on the matter.

19. There is almost no support for the use of historical data, except for a few responses that recommend historical ratings as a means to establish the extent to which strategic objectives had been met or value for money delivered over the assessment period (by comparing achievements against previous strategy statements and research income respectively). The vast majority of responses that express a preference tend to oppose historical ratings as a recipe for complacency among research intensive HEIs and utter alienation among the rest. Many responses also point out that the retrospective expert review process operated by the RAE, coupled with the increasingly large funding gaps between different RAE grades, already serves to reinforce historical divisions in the sector.

Crosscutting themes

There is significant support for a broader definition of research within research assessment, to encompass in particular applied research, research of relevance and utility, training of research students, and research that directly informs teaching.

- Roughly a quarter of HEIs, subject bodies and stakeholders agree that research assessment should be more representative of applied research.
- A third of HEIs also agree that research of direct relevance and utility should attract more credit in research assessment.
- About a fifth of HEIs, subject bodies and stakeholders argue that the training of research students should be an integral part of research assessment.
- Roughly a quarter of HEIs, subject bodies and stakeholders maintain that the interface with teaching should also be an integral part of research assessment.
- Among subject bodies, support for each of the areas outlined above is consistent across the five umbrella subject groups.

Applied research

20. Roughly a quarter of HEIs, subject bodies and stakeholders agree that research assessment should be more representative of applied research. This support flows from a perception that the RAE has been far too ambiguous about the value of applied research, particularly that which relates to professional practice in social work, clinical medicine and other community based health and social research; and links with industry. Advocates of applied research argue that this ambiguity has forced growing numbers of practice-based researchers to conform to other research modes, which are perceived to be more “RAE-friendly”. The British Medical Association observes, for example:

“The outcome of the RAE has been to diminish the activities of the community-based disciplines, and while this might simply reflect the quality of the research carried out, the effect has been to reduce the numbers staying in the academic community health specialties and negate against recruitment [sic].”

Supporters maintain that applied research must be put on an equal footing with pure research to mitigate against the perceived tendency of the RAE to marginalise research into patient care and other key areas. Suggestions for how this might be accomplished include broadening the types of evidence admissible, the representation of applied researchers on the subject panels and the definition of research excellence, and more ambitiously by creating a parallel assessment process or a separate category of staff whose main activities are professional focussed.

Research of relevance and utility

21. A third of HEIs also agree that research of direct relevance and utility should attract more credit in research assessment. Support here is mainly predicated on the perception that the premium international excellence category in the RAE has discriminated against research that is focussed on national, regional or local challenges, because by its very definition this research fails to compare to any international standards. Yet to the advocates of relevant research, this international premium is something of a paradox, since it is nationally or locally focussed research that often delivers more benefit to UK taxpayers. These advocates include the Bolton Institute of Higher Education, which observes, “If regional and national communities are to be expected to fund research (through taxation)

then it is reasonable to provide them with some tangible benefits." Echoing these concerns, the South East London NHS Research Health Authority asserts, "Research should have obvious relevance, even if at the abstract stage of development."

22. Again suggestions for how this type of research might be incorporated into research assessment revolve around broadening the types of evidence admissible, making panels more representative of their constituencies and applying the definitions of international, national and sub-national excellence selectively. Several responses also caution that greater recognition of relevant research must be accompanied by a clear delineation between research and short-term consultancy work or third stream activity.

Research training

23. About a fifth of HEIs, subject bodies and stakeholders argue that the training of research students should be incorporated in research assessment to sustain and safeguard the UK's eminence in research. One of these is the British Medical Association, which writes:

"The ability of individuals or institutions to pass on their knowledge of research and their research outcomes, and integrate research into educational programmes would be proof of a prevailing culture of research excellence that went beyond the contributions of sometimes transient individuals."

To those respondents that agree with the BMA, the current volume measure of PhD students within QR is clearly inadequate – ignoring the quality of research training, penalising disciplines that have structural problems in recruiting PhD students, and failing to recognise the training given to other researchers such as postdocs and clinical scientists.

Interface with teaching

24. Roughly a quarter of HEIs, subject bodies and stakeholders support broadening the parameters to embrace research that develops either the pedagogy or teaching subject matter in any given discipline. These respondents argue that the RAE has:

- a. Neglected, and thus devalued, pedagogical research by "hiving it off" to the Education panel for consideration, rather than assessing it within its parent subject panel.
- b. Encouraged more and more academics to focus on research at the expense of teaching quality (and the production of textbooks), by operating a rewards-based research assessment process in the absence of a parallel process for teaching.

This is perceived to have driven wedges between teaching and research, jeopardising the fulfilment of government policy in both areas.

25. Proposals for action to correct the perception outlined in a. include requiring at least one member of each panel to be expert in, and hence responsible for, assessing pedagogical research (University of Plymouth). Proposals to address b. include developing a

formula that allocates more QR funding to institutions achieving high grades in spite of disproportionately high teaching commitments; and giving teaching assessment power over the determination of resources.

Most respondents expressing a preference agree that all HEIs should continue to be assessed in the same way.

- About half of all responses from HEIs agree that the HE funding bodies should operate the same assessment process for all institutions.
- Among subject bodies and stakeholders, of those that make a clear statement on this issue, a majority also support a single assessment process.
- The vast majority of individuals either do not mention this issue or do not express a clear preference.

26. Most responses that express a preference agree that all HEIs should continue to be assessed in the same way. This is driven by a general perception that research assessment should have at its heart some absolute benchmarks equally applicable to all participating institutions, and that the results should be broadly consistent and comparable across the entire sector. Supporters of this approach comprise both research-intensive institutions and institutions without a strong record of research, which, while they might stand to benefit from a differentiated assessment process, object to the suggestion of a two-tier system.

27. There is also, however, strong support within these responses for a single system to be sufficiently flexible to take account of institutional ethos, mission, resources and patterns of development in arriving at a final grade for any given unit of assessment. In other words, according to the University of Glasgow, “All institutions should be assessed in the same process, but not necessarily in the same way.” This is echoed by many of the post-1992 HEIs as well as institutions with additional medical and clinical commitments.

28. It is important to note that much of this support for a single assessment process is predicated on the assumption that institutions at the lower end of the scale have some expectation of funding (an assumption that is clearly being undermined in the wake of the 2001 RAE financial settlement). Otherwise, according to City University, “Institutions should not be asked to take part in a game which they cannot win.”

There is a general consensus that the assessment process should be flexible but comparable for different disciplines

29. Discussion of whether each subject should be assessed in the same way reflects many of the concerns about the needs of consistency and comparability versus flexibility and diversity that were apparent in the previous section. On one hand (with one eye on the ultimate allocation of QR funding) are responses that believe the RAE exhibited unacceptably large variations in assessment methods between subjects, leading to some panels being relatively sanguine in awarding top grades, while others were far more grudging (see paragraph 8b). (The Royal Economic Society suggests this should be countered by normalising grades against international benchmarks of excellence in each

discipline – thereby giving more reward to, say, a 4 grade in one discipline where the UK is shown to be an international leader, than a 4 grade in another discipline where the UK is not among the world's best.)

30. On the other hand there are those emphasising the dangers of imposing a standardised process. The University of East London observes:

“The danger of standardisation is that entirely inappropriate forms of assessment based upon usually a science model become imposed upon other subject areas, distorting their practice in a very fundamental way.”

Echoing these concerns, the Standing Committee of Heads of Anthropology Departments writes, “Only by allowing latitude can professional confidence in the process be maintained.”

31. Most responses fall somewhere between these two views, coalescing around a compromise between the need to accommodate differences whilst ensuring that a given grade in one discipline is broadly comparable to the same grade in another. The School of Human Sciences at the University of Surrey is typical of this position, observing, “...subject panels should, within the broad constraints of a uniform system, be allowed to exercise expert review... in ways that are optimal for their own discipline.”

There is support for the elimination of the incentive to tactically manipulate the proportion of staff submitted to research assessment.

- About a quarter of responses discuss the issue of staff submission to research assessment. Of these, two thirds advocate the submission of all staff, mainly to eliminate the incentive for gamesplaying.
- Support for the submission of all staff is strongest among HEIs and subject bodies.

32. It is clear that the exclusion of particular members of staff in RAE submissions, aimed at securing the highest possible amount of funding, is regarded as the most unpleasant type of gamesplaying promoted by the exercise. Roughly two thirds of responses making a clear statement on the matter argue that this phenomenon should be eliminated by enforcing the submission of all research active staff (with allowances made for disproportionately high teaching, administrative or clinical roles). This would also help to vindicate the UK's claims to international excellence, which in many disciplines and institutions rests on the somewhat spurious grounds of 5 star departments with only a tiny fraction of researchers returned. In this way, according to Lancaster University:

“The extent to which there is a whole-hearted commitment to research, and a strong research culture, will thus be evident, and the proportion of staff on teaching-only contracts a matter of public record.”

33. However, there is a significant minority of responses that oppose the submission of all staff. Reasons given here include:

- a. Submission of all staff will disguise pockets of excellent research within institutions that are primarily concerned with other missions (connected to concerns about RAE-type averaging of individual achievements across UoAs).
- b. Since institutions have to live with the funding consequences, it should be left to institutions to decide how many staff to submit in order to maximise income (again this seems to be based on the assumption that RAE-type funding arrangements will persist).
- c. Submission of all staff will lead to an unmanageable administrative load.

Opponents also include those who believe that the submission of all research active staff will not put an end to gamesplaying, since institutions will move to put more staff on teaching-only contracts or take other more draconian measures with a terminal impact on many careers.

34. One way around this problem, developed in detail by an individual respondent at the University of Leeds and supported by Liverpool John Moores University among others, is to change from an RAE-type average grade for each unit of assessment to a cumulative score that is improved by increasing the number of staff submitted. Under this model, each researcher of “international” standing would attract a particular grade and unit of funding, a “national” researcher a lower grade and a “sub-national” researcher less still or perhaps nothing. By adding the grades together to produce a total grade for each unit this system would at least attach an incentive to the submission of more research-active staff, and, according to the respondent from Leeds, “...remove the perverse tendency to reward departments for omitting even strong and active researchers.” Moreover, by not rewarding the submission of sub-national staff, it would also resist the submission of unmanageably high numbers.

There is modest support for research assessment to address equality issues for young researchers and women

- About 1 in 7 responses agree that the RAE has mitigated against the appointment and submission of young researchers to UK HE.
- A further 1 in 15 state that the RAE has discriminated against the appointment and submission of female researchers.

35. About 1 in 7 responses agree that the RAE has militated against the appointment and submission of young researchers, because they are less likely than older colleagues to have assembled a strong list of published outputs. Most responses go little way beyond making the point and asserting that young researchers should be protected, although there are a few constructive suggestions for remedial action, including:

- a. Including young researchers in the volume measure but not in determining the grade.
- b. Making the development of young researchers count in the calculation of a unit’s final grade.

- c. Allowing young researchers to submit fewer outputs than more experienced colleagues.
- d. Automatically allocating a grade 5 to “outstanding” PhD students for five years.
- e. Creating a special Young Person’s return to the RAE, available to young researchers or women with family responsibilities, which would automatically carry a grade equivalent to the bottom of the top third percentile.

36. A further 1 in 15 state that the RAE has discriminated against the appointment and submission of female researchers, mainly because the demands of four published outputs are unrealistic for women with the responsibility of young families. These respondents include the Royal Society of Chemistry, which comments that the negative correlation between RAE grade and the proportion of female academics submitted in 2001 sits uncomfortably with Government aims. The London Mathematical Society echoes these concerns, emphasising that the proportion of women entered to the 2001RAE in Mathematics was lower than the proportion of women holding academic posts in the same discipline.

37. As is the case for young researchers, most comments on women in research assessment tend simply to assert the role of the RAE in exacerbating the problem, rather than suggest solutions. Suggestions for action include: balancing gender on the panels; establishing a national code of practice on people and research that incorporates the treatment of women; setting a longer cycle of assessment to accommodate those taking career breaks; and allowing women with family responsibilities to submit fewer than four outputs.

38. Only one submission mentions the issue of ethnic minority at any length. This response argues that the RAE has in fact had a positive impact on the career prospects of ethnic minority researchers, since it shifts decision making about research quality (which are of course linked to career progression) away from potentially closed local communities to the national arena. Of course this low response rate in respect of ethnic minorities may simply be a function of the type of audience receiving the Call for Evidence (as indeed it may be for young researchers, women and other groups).

39. More generally, several responses comment that the RAE is discriminatory in that it does not reward institutions, disciplines and types of research that tend to engage a relatively high proportion of young, female or ethnic minority researchers. The University of East London is indicative of these responses, commenting that the RAE, “...discriminates against these groups to the extent that it restricts the number and type of institutions which are funded to undertake research.”

40. It is important to note a significant minority of responses, particular from HEIs, which maintain equality issues should be addressed within institutions and not research assessment. About 10 HEIs, including Queen Mary, Cardiff University, City University and the University of Middlesex, more or less echo the argument made by Aston University that equality issues, “...must be addressed in the context of overall higher education policy. Research assessment must be, by its very nature, discriminatory.” The 1994 Group of

Universities agrees, stating that, "It is for institutions to ensure that their internal policies promote equality, not for the RAE."

Have we missed anything?

Of the other comments noted, most focus on funding issues generated by the 2001 RAE financial settlement.

41. There is strong support among HEIs in particular for the next round of research assessment to make the financial outcome of attaining a particular grade explicit before the exercise is run. The Royal College of Pathologists comments:

"Funding streams need to be clearly identified beforehand, taking into account that there will be grade drift, and this should be calculated in such a way that institutions and units that enhance their standing will be rewarded for this."

This position is echoed by both research intensive HEIs and institutions without a strong record of research, as well as sector wide bodies such as UUK, reflecting widespread disquiet about the ambiguous relationship between assessment and QR allocations.

42. Many of these responses also call for a longer or continuous grading scale with smaller funding gaps between each step, to ease some of the financial pressures associated with the exercise. According to the University of Glasgow, "Having a rating scale that is continuous would smooth the funding model and reduce the gamesplaying involved in trying to overcome a grade boundary." Other responses point out that a longer grading scale, while it might make the panels' job slightly more onerous, would at least put an end to assessors' agonising over submissions at the boundaries between huge funding gaps.

43. Finally, as a cautionary note to anyone contemplating the research assessment process, there are a handful of responses arguing that UK research would be far better served by dramatically reducing or even doing away with the HE funders' assessment process altogether. These include the University of Manchester School of Accounting and Finance, which comments:

"In the accounting literature there is a long-established notion of the "newly poor organisation" which, as results and financial position deteriorate, gets more and more concerned with measuring activity and establishing the right measures of performance and loses sight of the fact that what really matters are a range of other issues... The message to take from this is the real need to get back to some basic issues... Keep things simple and stable, although offer some scope for rewarding institutions that are improving. Concentrate assessment processes on areas where they can generate research improvement. [And] Leave successful departments to get on with what they have long proved capable of doing well."