

Introduction

1. LTSN is a network of 24 subject centres funded by the UK funding bodies. It aims to promote high quality learning and teaching through development and transfer of good practice in all subject disciplines and to provide a 'one stop shop' of learning and teaching resources for the HE community. This submission focuses on the relationships between this mission and research assessment. It is based on nearly 2 years of discussion within the Network, and three separate consultative exercises within the network (including one on the current review).
2. In the spirit of the consultation, especially paragraph 25, this response initially attempts to give an overview of 'what matters' to LTSN and its subject centres. Inevitably this concentrates on areas of commonality or apparent agreement which may not be the most important issue for particular subject communities. Subsequently it briefly addresses each group of questions in annex B.

RAE in the Wider HE Context

3. There are a number of points that we wish to make about the context in which the RAE occurs and the breadth of the definition of research that is used in the assessment exercise. First, the RAE needs to be seen within the context of the overall HE funding environment and its impact assessed holistically. At present the RAE does not encourage effective synergies with other strategic educational goals, indeed there is considerable evidence that it is driving apart research and teaching to the detriment of both the latter and the student learning experience. Although we recognise that the nature and ease of linkages vary by discipline and level of study, many LTSN Subject Centres regard this connectedness as a hallmark of authentic **higher** education which is increasingly imperilled. This can be partly addressed within research assessment by making linkages between research and teaching a criterion of assessment in future (which we would advocate - see below) but also requires complementary action in other spheres. Such action might include investigating the scope for funding scholarship designed to ensure that all teaching and learning activities of all staff (whether regarded as research active or not) are informed by research. Such scholarship of teaching and of learning would also help capacity building by enabling appropriate individuals to move onto discipline-based, pedagogical research. Furthermore, steps to reward products that successfully communicate research findings and integrate them into learning materials, such as textbooks and research-based software, could be promoted and rewarded.
4. Some subject areas and disciplines, notably in **arts and humanities**, believe that the intertwined nature of research and teaching needs to be more fully appreciated in the RAE. The development of new courses may lead to publications and, in performance-based disciplines, practice may be both 'research' and 'teaching'. One suggestion is that focussing on the linkages between research and teaching (see above) may be a fruitful way forward rather than their separateness. Another suggestion is that panels should seek to agree with subject associations and others the nature of the relationship for research assessment purposes before embarking on a RAE.
5. There is a need to address the status of and capacity for **subject-based pedagogical research**. Despite re-assuring statements about the status of pedagogic research prior to the 2001 RAE, doubts about the weight it would be given seem to have led to a decline in submissions to some

units of assessment from 1996 (e.g. French). The few UoAs that received pedagogical research submissions and comment on this matter indicate submissions were underdeveloped too (e.g. UoA 64 Art and Design). This points to the need for better defined criteria for discipline-based pedagogical research and for greater confidence in the assessment of such submissions. LTSN believes that these processes could be advanced if all panels included specialists able to assess discipline-based pedagogical research (and for this change to be announced early). Other action possibly both within and outwith the RAE is desirable to fund capacity building for pedagogical research within disciplines.

6. In some areas, for example, social work and health sciences, there is a feeling that **applied policy, professional and practitioner- focused research** (and its outputs) is under valued despite its contribution to public policy development and user needs. This has implications for learning and teaching as such research tends to generate materials for curricula design and delivery. Again these actual and potential linkages should be given more weight. In these areas especially, the definition of research needs to be sufficiently broad to take into account innovative, novice and practitioner research. A further suggestion is that user groups should, in these areas at least, be fully represented on panels.
7. LTSN is convinced that assessment should continue on a **discipline basis** and be sensitive to the tremendous epistemological and methodological differences between disciplines. At the same time some subject centres are concerned that important inter-disciplinary work is not sufficiently valued and steps need to be taken to ensure that this is addressed, perhaps through a grouping of UoAs in cognate areas to consider inter-disciplinary submissions.

Group 1 Expert Panel

8. LTSN respondents favour peer review as the main method of assessment. We suggest adding a pedagogical expert to all panels, considering greater inclusion of user groups and practitioners, where relevant, and the addition of interdisciplinary groupings. The focus should be largely retrospective but there is some support for the inclusion of current and prospective elements too. Included in the criteria should be means of building research infrastructure (including for pedagogical research), effectiveness of dissemination, and examples of verifiable ways in which research and teaching are linked at all relevant levels of provision. In Humanities and Arts the individual is the appropriate level of assessment, elsewhere Departments.

Group 2 Algorithm

9. LTSN SCc in the social sciences and humanities are largely against the use of metrics which they see as distorting, where the truth is contested (in philosophy), and open to manipulation and to discrimination in respect of gender, ethnicity, and status. We note that few learning and teaching journals, including new ones established by LTSN SCs, currently feature in citation indexes.

Group 3 Self Assessment

10. There are mixed views on whether self-assessment is appropriate. Those that support it, foresee it being combined with peer review. What should be included would vary to some extent by

discipline but all the points made above should be included. It could be burdensome if evidence is properly checked.

Group 4 Historical Ratings

11. LTSN does not favour historical ratings that will freeze the system and discourage innovation and change.

Group 5 Cross Cutting Themes

12. The purpose of the assessment should be to determine funding but also to encourage development (for example, of connections between research and teaching, of capacity).
13. There will be variation by subject in the criteria however linkages between research and teaching, dissemination, building capacity including pedagogical capacity, and user group relevance should all feature in the criteria.
14. Disciplines and subjects are too different for the same method to be applied universally although there can and should be common elements (see above).
15. Among the steps required to support equality of treatment are to adopt a wide definition of research; ensure that it stresses links between research and teaching; thoroughly involves users/practitioners etc and avoids metrics that could give rise to indirect discrimination. The gender and ethnic make up of panels needs to be kept under review.
16. Research assessment should be developmental and designed to achieve synergy with other educational goals, especially in learning and teaching policy. It needs to be located with an integrated system to ensure no deleterious and unintended effects. Other desirable features are that it is transparent; explicitly links research and teaching; is not too burdensome or expensive; and is sufficiently flexible to recognise subject differences.

Conclusion

17. This paper argues for a wider definition of research that places review of the RAE within the overall development of the HE system. In part, it reflects a growing realisation in the LTSN that successful quality enhancement activity (in learning and teaching) needs to be underpinned by good pedagogical research, a broad array of other research inputs (e.g. on capacity building for change), and a culture of scholarly endeavour amongst academic colleagues. Although the LTSN would not wish to be directly involved in assessment, it is increasingly in a position to offer advice and reflections on such matters as research utilisation in subject communities, appropriate ways of connecting research and teaching, appropriate 'experts' in discipline-based pedagogy and so on. LTSN looks forward to the development of the RAE and stands ready to help in whatever way it can.