

## **Outcomes of informal meetings held in the course of the RA review**

At the RA Review steering group's meeting on 17 December, Sir Gareth Roberts gave an overview of the outcomes of informal meetings held by the chair of the group and the review team with interested groups, over the course of the review. These outcomes present some areas of general agreement as well as some mixed views and difficulties for the review.

A summary of the slides used in Sir Gareth's presentation follows.

### **Review of research: report on consultation (HEFCE 01/17), March 2001**

- Large support to continue to fund selectively, on the basis of quality at a departmental level. There should not be significantly fewer than the current number of units of assessment.
  - Large support for the retention of a process of research assessment based on peer review.
  - General acceptance that assessment panels should be given more freedom to define the characteristics of excellence obtaining within their disciplines.
  - Support for a new funding stream for capability development to support research of regional as well as national importance in fields of emerging significance.
  - 30% support for policy changes designed to encourage collaboration.
- Strong support for scholarship to be funded by the funding stream for teaching.

### **Higher Education: Easing the Burden Better Regulation Task Force July 2002**

- We hope that within its review HEFCE will consider how it might reduce the cost burden on HEIs of submitting to the RAE.
- We should also like to see HEFCE consider the likely impact of any revised RAE or RAE replacement. It should focus on all the costs of HEIs both direct and indirect.
- We would expect any replacement or revised RAE to meet the Principles of Good Regulation.

These recommendations have been accepted by HEFCE.

**Outcomes of visits by Sir Gareth Roberts and the review team in connection with the RA review.**

Agreement on the following:

- General rejection of a radical change; support for expert/peer review.
- Methods of evaluation should be chosen to match the character of the research and its objectives i.e. more differentiation between subject areas than hitherto.
- Greater emphasis on international benchmarking and involvement of panel members.
- Greater transparency in the selection of Panels and an obligation for them to conform to their published guidelines for assessment.
- Assessment should cover and reward a range of criteria leading possibly to a research excellence profile rather than a single grade.
- Institutions should submit all staff whose contracts oblige them to do research.
- Ensure that young or newly appointed staff at the start of their research careers are not disadvantaged by the assessment process.
- Greater emphasis in the institutional submission on its strategy, research strengths, forward look and the way in which research informs its teaching, especially to postgraduates.
- Normalize gradings or introduce a ranking system in order to maintain a consistency of standards between Panels.
- Strengthen third leg and capability funding but separate it for assessment purposes from the main research assessment exercise. Exploitation of leading edge research would be reviewed alongside the full RAE.

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Mixed views on the following:

- Size of unit of assessment, but general agreement that overall number should be reduced from 69.
- Rolling assessment rather than a complete assessment of all subjects every five years.
- Frequency of review. Support for longer cycle for Arts and Humanities and related subjects.
- Panel chairs should be non-academic and chair several panels. Emphasis on expert rather than peer review.
- Degree of self-assessment within a peer review system.

- Grading system should link volume and quality, but agreement that individual grades should not be made public.
- Need for all institutions to be governed by the same assessment exercise. Less research intensive universities and colleges might opt out and be rewarded additionally via the Research Councils. Smaller institutions might be assessed as a single unit.
- Stronger links in assessment exercise between Research Councils and Funding Councils e.g. in terms of information gathering and membership of Panels.

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Some general difficulties:

- Achievement of a lighter touch but nevertheless rigorous assessment system.
- How to reward multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research within a system similar to the present RAE.
- Present emphasis on publications.
- Brigading together of subjects in the Social Sciences.
- Absence of suitable metrics for assessing work linked to and which impacts on practice.
- Separation of parameters/metrics used to assess third-leg and RAE activities.
- How to discourage institutions from being risk averse and encourage them to foster long term research.
- Possible requirement to link Teaching and Research.