

Meeting	Agenda Item	Reference No
12/12/08	18	HEFCW/08/96

1 Issue

- 1.1 This paper sets out arrangements for publication of the outcomes of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) later this month, and outlines the subsequent actions and decisions which will be required from the Council.

2 Corporate Planning Implications / Rationale for paper

The Corporate Plan states that HEFCW, with the other UK higher education funding bodies, will publish the outcomes of the UK-wide 2008 Research Assessment Exercise in December 2008; and that HEFCW will implement revised research funding arrangements based on the RAE outcomes from academic year 2009/10.

3 Recommendation(s)

- 3.1 The Council is invited to note the contents of this paper.

4 Timing for decisions

- 4.1 The paper is presented for information in order to brief the Council on arrangements for the publication of the RAE outcomes later this month. No decisions are required at this stage.

5 Council members' interests

- 5.1 No conflicts of interests have been declared in advance of the meeting.

6 Further information

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7 Background

- 7.1 The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) is conducted on a UK-wide basis by the four higher education funding bodies to assess the quality of research. The outcomes are used to drive formula funding for research (QR). The previous RAE was undertaken in 2001.
- 7.2 Assessment is based on peer review, undertaken by panels of experts. In the 2008 RAE, research could be submitted for assessment to just under 70 separate subject-based Units of Assessment (UoAs). Institutions selected the UoAs to which they wished to make submissions.
- 7.3 In 2008, the outcomes will be expressed in the form of quality profiles, which will show the proportion of work in each submission which reaches each of four defined levels of quality. These run from 1* (quality which is recognised nationally) to 4* (quality which is world-leading). These quality profiles will replace the seven-point rating scale (1 to 5*) which was used in the previous RAE. Further information about the format of the outcomes is shown at **Annex A**.

Timetable for Publication of Results and Subsequent Actions

- 7.4 The outcomes of the 2008 RAE will be published on 18 December 2008 on the RAE website (www.rae.ac.uk) and in printed form.
- 7.5 We will send an email to Council members on 18 December, providing a link to the results on the RAE website and a copy of HEFCW's press release. Council members will receive a printed copy of the results a few days later.
- 7.5 The full timetable for publication and analysis of results, and the schedule for the Council's subsequent decisions, is set out below:

RAE results published on RAE website. Council members provided with access via an email from HEFCW.	18 December 2008
Presentation to Council on RAE outcomes in Wales.	12 January 2009 (at UW Newport, prior to institutional visit)
Council considers analysis of RAE outcomes and proposals for research funding arrangements (QR and PGR – see paragraph 7.7 below)	30 January 2009
Council finalises QR and PGR funding arrangements and approves allocations for 2009/10.	Council meeting on 13 March 2009
Consideration of any further measures which need to be taken to strengthen research base in Wales in light of RAE outcomes	Spring/Summer 2009

Decisions Required

7.6 From 2009/10 onwards, formula allocations for research will be based on the outcomes of the 2008 RAE. At its meeting in March 2008, the Council approved a number of technical adjustments to the QR funding formula in preparation for the new allocations, and these adjustments have been notified to the sector (Circular W08/14HE).

7.7 The main issues on which decisions have still to be made are as follows:

a) *The weightings to be attached to each of the four quality levels (1* to 4*) in the QR funding formula.* Factors to be considered here will be:

- the need to ensure that funding for top-rated research (i.e. 3* and 4*) remains competitive with that in other parts of the UK, in accordance with the Council's statement of research policy objectives, agreed in June 2007;
- the extent to which support can also be afforded for 1* research.

b) *The total amount of funding to be made available for QR.* In 2008/09, QR funding amounts to £67.3 million. The current assumption is that the funding from the Research Investment Fund (£4.1m), created when QR funding was restricted to UoAs rated 4 and above, will be reunited with the QR funding stream. Additionally, the Council agreed in principle in October 2007, in the context of discussions on the strategic use of funding, to increase the proportion of the block grant directed to research. In modelling the distribution of the recurrent grant for 2009/10, provision has been made to transfer £2 million from teaching to research. The Council will need to consider whether this funding should be added to QR, or used to promote research in some other, more targeted way.

c) *Whether there should be volume thresholds.* The new system of quality profiles could mean that some departments which do not have research strengths in depth may nevertheless achieve a very small volume of starred activity. If HEFCW funds all of these small pockets of work, QR funding could be spread too thinly to be effective. The Council may therefore wish to consider imposing minimum volume thresholds for eligibility for QR funding.

d) *The eligibility threshold for funding through the postgraduate research training (PGR) funding stream.* At present, this threshold is set at the level of a RAE rating of 3b or above, a level which remained unchanged when the threshold for QR funding was raised to 4. In determining the QR funding arrangements after the 2008 RAE, the Council will also need to determine where to set the threshold for PGR.

7.8 In the longer term, the Council will wish to consider whether there are any additional measures which need to be taken to strengthen the position of the Welsh research base in the light of the RAE outcomes.

8 Financial implications

- 8.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from this paper. However, the Council will use the outcomes of the 2008 RAE to allocate QR funding from 2009/10 onwards. It will be invited to take decisions on outstanding aspects of the funding formula in January 2009, and to finalise funding arrangements and approve institutional allocations at its meeting in March 2009.

9 Communications implications

- 9.1 It is likely that there will be very considerable press interest in the outcomes of the RAE. A UK press conference will be held in London on 17 December. HEFCW will issue a separate press release on the same day.

10 Diversity and Equal Opportunities implications

- 10.1 In planning the 2008 RAE, the funding bodies took full account of diversity and equal opportunities issues, particularly in relation to race, gender and age. Advice was obtained from the Equality Challenge Unit, and institutions were required to develop a code of practice to govern the selection of staff for submission. The funding bodies intend to undertake an equal opportunities monitoring exercise after the RAE.

11 Risk Assessment

RISK	ACTION TO ADDRESS RISK
There is a risk that the Welsh sector's performance may not compare favourably with the rest of the UK.	We will review the situation and consider any additional actions which may be required to strengthen the Welsh research base in the light of the RAE performance.
There is a risk that QR funding in Wales may not be competitive with the rest of the UK.	There is some scope to augment the present level of QR funding by subsuming the Research Investment Fund into QR, and drawing on funding transferred into research as a result of the Council's decisions on strategic use of funding.