

## Outcomes of 2008 Research Assessment Exercise

**Disclosable**

Meeting  
30/01/09

Agenda Item  
6

Reference No  
HEFCW/09/02

---

### **Introduction**

- 1 This paper presents the outcomes of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) for the Welsh higher education sector.

### **Corporate Planning Implications/Rationale for the Paper**

- 2.1 The Corporate Plan included a commitment that HEFCW, in collaboration with the other UK higher education funding bodies, would publish the outcomes of the UK-wide 2008 Research Assessment Exercise in December 2008. The outcomes were duly published on 18 December 2008, and this paper provides some analysis.
- 2.2 The paper covers some of the material which was presented to Council members prior to an institutional visit on 12 January. It is repeated here in order to provide context for the subsequent paper on research funding arrangements (Agendum 7).

### **Recommendation**

- 3 The Council is invited to comment on and note the contents of this paper.

### **Timing for Decisions**

- 4 There are no decisions arising directly from this paper. Initial proposals for the allocation of the Council's grant for research (QR) are presented in a separate paper on this agenda.

### **Council members' interests**

- 5 No conflicts of interest have been declared in advance of the meeting.

### **Further information**

Contact Linda Tiller (029 2068 2228; email: [linda.tiller@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:linda.tiller@hefcw.ac.uk)).

## Background

- 6.1 The RAE is a UK-wide exercise conducted jointly by the four higher education funding bodies. Its main purpose is to produce quality indicators for use in determining the allocation of grant for research (QR).
- 6.2 The 2008 RAE was the sixth in a series of such exercises; the previous RAE took place in 2001. The 2008 RAE was the last exercise in the current form, and the funding bodies are currently developing new arrangements for research assessment which will make greater use of metric indicators.

## The 2008 RAE Process

- 7.1 The 2008 RAE was conducted on broadly similar lines to previous exercises. The quality assessments were undertaken by subject-based panels of experts on the basis of written submissions from institutions. In 2008, there were 67 such panels, each responsible for a separate Unit of Assessment (UoA). There were additionally 15 overarching Main Panels whose role was to promote consistency across the exercise.
- 7.2 The principal difference between the 2008 RAE and the previous exercise was that in 2001 the outcome for each submission was expressed as a single rating on a seven point scale (1 to 5\*) but, in 2008, outcomes were expressed in the form of a quality profile. The new approach enabled panels to exercise a finer degree of judgement at the top end, and also provides a more detailed picture of the full range of quality within submissions.
- 7.3 The profiles were built up from assessment of the quality of research outputs (the main component), the research environment and evidence of peer esteem. The profiles show, for each submission, the proportion of work (in 5% steps) judged to reach each of four quality levels ranging from 4\* (world leading) down to 1\* (nationally recognised) and unclassified. The full definitions of the quality levels are shown at **Annex A**.

## Number and Size of Submissions

- 7.4 The number of submissions from Welsh HEIs to the 2008 RAE are shown in the following table, together with comparative UK-wide figures.

|                                                      | <b>Wales</b>        | <b>UK</b> | <b>Wales as % of UK</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| <b>Number of institutions submitting to 2008 RAE</b> | 10<br>plus<br>CAWCS | 159       | 6.9%                    |
| <b>Number of submissions to 2008 RAE</b>             | 144                 | 2,344     | 6.1%                    |
| <b>Number of Category A staff (FTE) to 2008 RAE</b>  | 2,578               | 52,409    | 4.9%                    |

- 7.5 The number of staff submitted by Welsh HEIs to the 2008 RAE was 14.9% higher than in 2001<sup>1</sup>. The increase for the UK as a whole between the two exercises was 12.3%.
- 7.6 At the institutional level, the institutions in Wales which had the largest increases in staff volume between the two exercises were Swansea University (increase of 109 FTEs, or 27%) and Cardiff University (increase of 97 FTEs or 10%).
- 7.7 The overall distribution of Category A staff by broad subject group in the 2001 and 2008 RAEs is shown at **Annex B**.

### Quality Outcomes

- 7.8 The following material is attached:
- 2008 RAE outcomes for the Welsh HE sector - **Annex C**
  - Average quality profile for each institution – **Annex D**
  - Notional volume of Category A staff (FTE) by institution and quality level – **Annex E**
  - Graphical representations of notional volume of Category A staff (FTE) by institution and quality level – **Annexes F and G**.
- 7.9 The overall quality profile for the Welsh HE sector as a whole was as follows:

| Quality Level | % of Research Activity |
|---------------|------------------------|
| 4*            | 14%                    |
| 3*            | 35%                    |
| 2*            | 36%                    |
| 1*            | 13%                    |
| Unclassified  | 2%                     |
| Total         | 100%                   |

- 7.10 The 4\* and 3\* quality in the sector was heavily concentrated in a limited number of institutions, as indicated in the following table:

|                             | % of total 4* quality for Wales | % of total 3* and 4* quality for Wales | % of total 1*, 2*, 3* and 4* quality for Wales |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Cardiff University          | 54%                             | 47%                                    | 40%                                            |
| Swansea University          | 16%                             | 19%                                    | 20%                                            |
| Aberystwyth University      | 13%                             | 11%                                    | 12%                                            |
| Bangor University           | 9%                              | 10.5%                                  | 11%                                            |
| Other seven HEIs plus CAWCS | 8%                              | 12.5%                                  | 17%                                            |
| Total                       | 100%                            | 100%                                   | 100%                                           |

<sup>1</sup> In 2001, staff figures returns consisted of both Category A staff (staff employed by the submitting institution on the census date) and Category A\* staff (staff who transferred between institutions in the year before the census date). The 2001 figures in this paper exclude Category A\* staff who had left the submitting institution by the census date.

## Performance at Subject Level

7.11 There were strong performances by the Welsh sector in the following UoAs where, in each case, more than one institution attained proportions of 3\* and 4\* quality which significantly exceeded the UK average for the UoA:

- Allied Health Professions
- Computer Science and Informatics
- Civil Engineering
- Psychology
- Celtic Studies

7.12 There were also a number of UoAs in which **individual** institutions performed strongly, attaining proportions of 3\* and 4\* quality which significantly exceeded the UK average for the UoA. These UoAs included:

- Accounting and Finance (Bangor University)
- Business and Management (Cardiff University)
- Communications, Cultural and Media Studies (Cardiff University)
- Psychiatry and Neuroscience (Cardiff University)
- Sociology (Cardiff University)
- Politics and International Studies (Aberystwyth University)
- Town and Country Planning (Cardiff University).

7.13 Additionally, there was a good performance in the joint submission from UWIC and UW Newport in Art and Design, where the level of 4\* quality was below the UK average, but 3\* was very significantly above.

## UK Quality Comparisons

7.14 The overall percentage of research activity at each quality level achieved by the Welsh sector was noted in paragraph 7.9 above. The equivalent figures for the UK as a whole, and for the other constituent countries, are as follows:

|            | Wales | England | Scotland | N Ireland | UK  |
|------------|-------|---------|----------|-----------|-----|
| <b>4*</b>  | 14%   | 18%     | 15%      | 14%       | 17% |
| <b>3*</b>  | 35%   | 37%     | 37%      | 36%       | 37% |
| <b>2*</b>  | 36%   | 32%     | 34%      | 37%       | 33% |
| <b>1*</b>  | 13%   | 11%     | 12%      | 11%       | 11% |
| <b>u/c</b> | 2%    | 2%      | 2%       | 1%        | 2%  |

7.15 These figures indicate that Wales' performance is slightly behind the UK as a whole. This is similar to the situation in the 2001 RAE, when comparisons between countries were made on the basis of overall weighted average scores, as shown in the following table. It can therefore be concluded that Wales has broadly maintained its position relative to the rest of the UK.

|                  | <b>2001 RAE – overall weighted average scores (calculated on a 7-point scale)</b> |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Wales            | 5.16                                                                              |
| England          | 5.45                                                                              |
| Scotland         | 5.37                                                                              |
| Northern Ireland | 5.09                                                                              |
| UK               | 5.42                                                                              |

***The Council is invited to note the analysis of the RAE outcomes contained contents in this paper.***

### **Next Steps**

7.16 The current Corporate Strategy indicates that the Council will take stock of the 2008 RAE outcomes and identify any further measures which could be taken to strengthen the research base in Wales. It is envisaged that a paper on this issue will be presented to the Council later in 2009, following discussion by the Research, Innovation and Engagement Committee.

### **Financial Implications**

7.17 There are no financial implications arising directly from this paper. Initial proposals for allocating the Council's grant for research (QR) on the basis of the 2008 RAE outcomes are presented in a separate paper on this agenda.

### **Communications Implications**

7.18 HEFCW issued a press release on the RAE outcomes in Wales to coincide with the publication of the results in December. This resulted in coverage by BBC Wales, S4C and the *Western Mail* among others. There was also significant press coverage at UK level.

### **Diversity and Equal Opportunities Implications**

7.19 In planning the 2008 RAE, the funding bodies took full account of diversity and equal opportunity issues in relation to race, age and gender. 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.

7.20 The RAE Team intends review the pattern of submissions to the 2008 RAE in order to establish whether there were any equal opportunities issues. Whilst it was originally envisaged that HESA would collect data on numbers of

submitted and non-submitted staff for this purpose this did not, in the event, prove possible. However, alternative arrangements are being developed.

### **Risk Assessment**

| <b>RISK</b>                                                                                                                    | <b>ACTION TO ADDRESS RISK</b>                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| There is a risk that the Welsh sector may not be able to sustain its performance relative to the rest of the UK in the future. | We will take stock of the current RAE outcomes and consider any additional actions which may be required to strengthen the research base. |
| There is a risk that QR funding allocations in Wales following the 2008 RAE may not be competitive with the rest of the UK.    | Funding issues are considered in a separate paper on this agenda.                                                                         |