

**To: Heads of higher education
institutions in Wales**

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**FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS FOR RESEARCH ASSESSMENT: INITIAL DECISIONS BY
THE UK FUNDING BODIES.**

I have pleasure in enclosing copies of a statement on future arrangements for research assessment issued jointly by the four UK higher education funding bodies.

This document can also be accessed on the new RAE website – www.rae.ac.uk.

**PROFESSOR PHILIP GUMMETT
DIRECTOR OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

rae2008

Research Assessment Exercise

Initial decisions by the UK funding bodies

February 2004
Ref RAE 01/2004

Higher Education Funding Council for England
Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland

RAE 2008: Initial decisions by the UK funding bodies

To	Heads of publicly-funded higher education institutions in the United Kingdom
Of interest to those responsible for	Research
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Executive summary

Purpose

1. This document announces key decisions by the UK higher education funding bodies on the timing and conduct of the next Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).

Key points

2. We undertake periodic assessments of the quality of research carried out in higher education institutions (HEIs) in all disciplines and across the UK. The purpose is to inform our allocations of grant for research, and to support our shared policy of promoting continuous improvement in the quality of the UK research base and its economic and social impact.

3. The last RAE took place in 2001. Following a thorough review of our approach to research assessment, led by Sir Gareth Roberts, we have agreed to carry out another UK-wide RAE to be completed in 2008. Like previous exercises, this will be based upon expert review by discipline-based panels considering written submissions from HEIs.

4. A number of significant changes will be made to the process, reflecting the review and subsequent consultations. The main points announced in this document are as follows:

- a. Timing: results will be published in December 2008. Subsequent RAEs will follow on a six-year cycle. For the 2008 exercise, the census date is 31 October 2007, and closing date for submissions is 30 November 2007.
 - b. Submissions: to be eligible for submission, research outputs in all disciplines must be published between 1 January 2001 and 31 July 2007. Submissions may list no more than four outputs for each named researcher; a lower maximum may be set by some panels.
 - c. Assessment: a single assessment method will be used for all participating HEIs. Assessment will be conducted by some 15-20 main panels, and around 70 sub-panels. The panel structure will be finalised in consultation with the research community in 2004. There will be no separate assessment of research competences or mid-point monitoring. The assessment process will be designed to ensure that joint submissions are not discouraged. Due weight will be given to applied research assessed against appropriate criteria of excellence.
 - d. Results: results will be published as a continuously graded quality profile for each submission, at the sub-panel level. This would replace the existing seven-point rating scale. Quality profiles will be criterion-referenced against clearly defined common standards.
5. In developing our plans for the next RAE we have paid particular attention to ensuring that the cost of the exercise, and the administrative burden that it will place upon HEIs, are kept to the minimum – having regard to its expected impact and to the resources to be allocated using its outcomes.
 6. Much remains to be done to finalise the detailed plans for the exercise. We are starting work on this immediately. A consultation on the assessment panel structure and appointment of main panel and sub-panel members will begin shortly, and we envisage making a further detailed announcement on the conduct of the exercise during 2005. A provisional timetable for the exercise is in Table 2 below.

Action required

7. This report is for information.

Introduction

8. The most recent UK Research Assessment Exercise was carried out by the four UK higher education funding bodies (the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland) and was completed in 2001. The purpose of the exercise was to provide authoritative and comprehensible quality ratings for research in all disciplines carried out in universities and colleges across the UK.

9. This was the fifth in a series of assessments that started with the Research Selectivity Exercise conducted by the University Grants Committee in 1986. The primary function of the RAE ratings was to inform the funding bodies' allocation of grant for research, reflecting the established government and funding bodies policy that these resources should be allocated according to research quality. The exercise also had important roles in providing both public information and quality assurance for public expenditure on research in higher education.

10. From the start, the RAE has been an expert review process in which discipline-based panels of experts – mainly, but not exclusively, people working in research within the higher education sector – assess the quality of research in their own discipline. Assessments are against common objectively defined standards, and are based on a common set of information submitted by the HEIs, but with due variation between disciplines in the detailed approach and criteria for assessment.

11. The RAE is generally agreed to have had a significant positive impact. The exercise has driven a sustained improvement in the overall quality of the UK research base, and has made a major contribution to maintaining national economic growth and international competitiveness. It has highlighted the very best research and has encouraged HEIs to take a rigorous approach in developing and implementing their own research strategies. It has enabled the Government and funding bodies to maximise the return from the limited public funds available for basic research. The RAE has also strengthened the dual support system for research funding – under which grant from the funding bodies supports a permanent research capability and infrastructure, and basic curiosity-driven research – underpinning the higher education sector's capacity to undertake research of public benefit commissioned by the Research Councils, charities and others.

12. At the same time, the exercise has been subject to some criticism. Concerns have been expressed that the exercise:

- favours established disciplines and approaches over new and interdisciplinary work
- does not deal well with applied and practice-based research in particular
- places an undue administrative burden on the sector
- has a negative impact upon institutional behaviour as HEIs and departments manage their research strategies, and shape their RAE submissions, in order to achieve the highest possible ratings.

13. After the 2001 exercise there were also concerns that, with over half of all submitted work divided between the top two points on a seven-point scale, the ratings produced by the exercise could no longer provide the degree of discrimination required by a policy of selective funding.

Review of research assessment

14. In response to these concerns, following the 2001 RAE we commissioned a full review of our approach to research assessment. This was undertaken by a group led by Sir Gareth Roberts. Its report was published for consultation in May 2003 (HEFCE 2003/22).

15. The review group's report proposed some radical changes to the assessment process, but concluded that the fundamental basis of the RAE – discipline-based expert review founded upon academic judgements – was sound. This was strongly endorsed by the subsequent consultation with the sector, which closed on 30 September 2003. We are grateful to Sir Gareth for his authoritative report, which laid the foundations for the decisions on the way forward set out in this document, and to respondents to the consultation for their considered responses.

16. The main points from the consultation responses are:

- a. Overwhelming support for an assessment process built around expert review conducted by discipline-based panels. There was also support for the proposal that panels should be helped to make better use of quantitative indicators relevant to their discipline.
- b. Strong support for a six-year assessment cycle, but also for allowing adequate lead time in the next exercise.
- c. Very strong support for the proposal to replace the rating scale by a quality profile.
- d. Strong support for the proposal that assessment panels should work more closely together in groups based upon cognate disciplines.
- e. Support for the principle that the assessment process should be designed better to recognise excellence in applied and practice-based research, in new disciplines, and in fields crossing traditional discipline boundaries.
- f. Strong concern that some elements of the review group proposals were unduly complex and could impose a greater burden than the likely outcomes would justify. This applied particularly to the proposals for a multi-track assessment process, for mid-point monitoring, and for assessment of research competences.

Document structure

17. The next three sections of this document set out decisions taken jointly by the funding bodies under the following headings:

- Framework for research assessment
- Submissions
- Assessment process and outcomes.

18. This is followed by an outline timetable for the 2008 RAE; discussion of its likely cost and regulatory impact (within the terms proposed by the Government's Better Regulation Task Force); and consideration of equal opportunities issues raised by the review.

19. The decisions announced in this document are those considered essential to start the process leading to the next round of assessments. Further decisions on all aspects of the assessment process will follow in due course, and some of these will be the subject of further consultations as indicated below.

Framework for research assessment

20. The four UK funding bodies will continue jointly to assess the quality of work undertaken in UK universities through a regular Research Assessment Exercise.

21. The next RAE will be completed in 2008 – we envisage that the ratings will be published in December 2008. We plan to work to a six-year assessment cycle thereafter. The decision to delay the exercise until 2008, rather than completing it in 2007 as had also been proposed, reflects the strong representations made for allowing adequate time for HEIs and panels to prepare fully, even if this meant initially stretching the preferred six-year cycle.

22. The RAE will continue to be a discipline-based expert review process in which judgements on the quality of research are made by researchers and experts active in that discipline. Decisions on ratings will be made by some 15-20 main panels, based upon detailed assessment work by around 70 sub-panels. The outcomes will be published as quality profiles for around 70 units of assessment (see Table 1 below). The main panels and sub-panels will work closely together.

23. There will be a further separate consultation on the subject coverage and grouping of main panels and sub-panels, and the process for appointing their members. We envisage that membership of the sub-panels will include people with experience in commissioning and using research – in industry, commerce and the public sector – and that people with experience of research in other countries will attend panel meetings at some stage of the assessment. The chairs of the main panels will not be particularly associated with any one of the sub-panels. Working within a robust framework of guidance and support, they will be responsible for ensuring that processes are applied consistently across the sub-panels. The membership of the main panels will include the chairs of the relevant sub-panels.

24. The rating scale used in 2001, under which departments were assigned grades based upon typical quality descriptors, will be replaced by a quality profile. This will identify the proportions of work in each submission reaching each of four defined 'starred' quality levels. Work judged to fall below the lowest level will be unclassified. (See Table 1 below.) The definitions of the starred quality levels will be announced later in 2004.

Table 1 Sample quality profile*

Unit of assessment A	FTE staff submitted for assessment	Percentage of research activity in the submission judged to meet the standard for:				
		four star	three star	two star	one star	unclassified
University X	50	15	25	40	15	5
University Y	20	0	5	40	45	10

* The figures are for fictional universities. They do not indicate expected proportions.

25. We are still considering the definition of research to be used for the exercise, but from the starting point that the definition used in 2001 may need to be reviewed rather than changed fundamentally. This too will be announced later this year.

26. Institutions will not face a choice between different assessment routes. This element of the proposed model was not fully endorsed by the consultation responses. There will therefore be no additional UK-wide process by which the funding bodies would advise institutions on their research performance as measured by metrics alone in the lead-up to the assessment.

27. Departmental research strategies will be assessed through the RAE process as in previous exercises. Consultation responses indicated that ensuring equality of opportunity is an important issue in this context. Accordingly, where equal opportunities issues are pertinent to the exercise, these will be explicitly addressed in developing the process and assessment criteria. These matters, and issues of staff development and dissemination, may also be addressed by the funding bodies through existing mechanisms outside the research assessment process. (We return to this question in paragraph 68 below.)

Submissions

28. As in previous RAEs, institutions will be asked to produce a submission for each department to be assessed (see the definitions in the glossary). The submission will contain the information required by the main panels and sub-panels to assess the quality of work in the department.

29. The closing date for submissions will be 30 November 2007. The census date will be 31 October 2007 (see Table 2 below).

30. The assessment will consider work undertaken between 1 January 2001 and 31 July 2007, including cited research outputs first published (or otherwise brought into the public domain) during this period. Any textual commentary in the submissions describing research activity, outputs and achievements should refer to the same period. This assessment period will apply in all disciplines.

31. As in previous RAEs, HEIs will be asked to identify staff whose research outputs they wish to submit for assessment. These should be staff who have undertaken significant autonomous research, or otherwise made a significant independent contribution to the research output of a unit or department. Definitions of the groups eligible to be submitted for assessment, and a means of identifying those to be counted within the volume measure in subsequent funding, if required, will be developed within the exercise. Again as before, institutions will be responsible for deciding which eligible staff to submit for assessment. The main panels and sub-panels will consider only the work of submitted staff, and no demographic information will be collected about those who are not submitted.

32. Institutions will be asked to identify in their submissions up to four pieces of work for each researcher. However, sub-panels may (with the agreement of main panels) elect to set a lower maximum of two or three items where members agree this would be appropriate to a particular unit of assessment (UoA).

33. In line with previous practice, other required elements of the submissions will be clarified during 2004.

Joint submissions

34. The assessment of research undertaken jointly by two or more institutions has presented a challenge to previous exercises. The need to avoid creating any disincentive to such work was again highlighted in the consultations. The funding bodies are all committed to supporting and promoting collaborative research. While research assessment is not regarded as a specific means of implementing this commitment, we shall be working together to ensure that the next RAE has no negative impact on collaboration between departments and institutions, and that it works with the grain of our policies in this area.

35. Where a submission is made jointly by two or more institutions, they will be asked to indicate their respective shares of the work described. This will be used as an indication of the relative significance of their inputs, and as a basis for allocating grant. These shares need not correspond to the full-time equivalent (FTE) numbers of staff from each institution involved in the work.

Groups of researchers

36. The assessment process will allow the identification of groups of researchers, and of outputs produced by those groups, within a submission. In disciplines where research is commonly undertaken by groups rather than by individuals, it is desirable to ensure that all those making a substantive independent contribution to the outcome are recognised. This may mean allowing the submission of the same cited output by a number of submitted researchers, without risk that the main panel or sub-panel will draw adverse inferences about the range and depth of a department's work. At the same time, we would not wish to encourage the submission of people who are not fully autonomous or experienced researchers. We will seek to ensure that main panels and sub-panels are able to judge what contribution each submitted individual researcher has made to a group output.

37. Further guidance will follow on the eligibility of staff for submission to the RAE and the categories under which they are to be submitted.

Assessment process and outcomes

Panel structure

38. There will be some 15-20 main panels, advised by around 70 sub-panels (in line with previous exercises since 1992). Each sub-panel will cover a discrete subject area or unit of assessment, and will report to a single main panel. Each main panel will cover a group of sub-panels, with groupings to be decided through a process of consultation.

39. Sub-panels will be responsible for:

- preparing draft statements of relevant criteria and working methods

- making recommendations to main panels on the quality profiles to be awarded for each submission.

40. The main panels will be responsible for:

- reviewing and endorsing the criteria and working methods to be used by the sub-panels
- deciding on the quality profile to be awarded to each submission
- maintaining a good level of communication and joint working with the other main panels.

41. Combined with the uniform definitions to be developed for the starred quality profiles, this arrangement should provide greater assurance that the panels are working to common, objectively defined quality standards.

42. The funding bodies are consulting separately on two related issues:

- the division of the academic landscape between discipline-based sub-panels, and their grouping between main panels, within the structure outlined above
- the process for appointing main panel and sub-panel members, and the bodies that might be invited to propose people as members.

43. We are paying particular attention to how we might secure better representation on main panels and sub-panels of the commissioners and users of research – especially people with personal experience both of conducting research and of its commercial, industrial and public service applications. This was highlighted in the review group's report, in a number of responses to the consultations, and again in the recent Lambert review¹.

44. The consultations on panel membership will invite views on how to secure an effective input to the assessment process by people who have direct experience of high-quality research in other countries, and are thus well placed to assist in validating judgements of 'international' research excellence.

45. Criteria and working methods for each UoA will be published in draft form for consultation two years before the submission date; the final criteria will follow once responses to that consultation have been considered. Criteria and assessment methods may vary between sub-panels advising the same main panel, to the extent that this is agreed to be justified by differences in research methods and culture between UoAs.

46. We attach considerable weight to what has been said, by the review group and by respondents to the consultations, about the need to ensure that applied and practice-based research are not disadvantaged by the exercise.

47. The funding bodies' quality-related research grant is not the sole means by which applied research could be supported and encouraged within higher education. For example, we note the recent recommendations of the Lambert review for a new and separate funding stream to support collaborative work between HEIs and business in England. Nonetheless we

¹ 'Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration', December 2003, HM Treasury, available on the web at www.lambertreview.org.uk.

agree that, where researchers in higher education have undertaken applied and practice-based research that they consider to have achieved due standards of excellence, they should be able to submit it to the RAE in the expectation that it will be assessed fairly against appropriate criteria. As proposed by the review group, we will ask main panels and sub-panels in all disciplines where this may be an issue to ensure that their criteria statements make clear how they will assess practice-based and applied research, according to criteria reflecting appropriate characteristics of excellence.

Subject-specific metrics

48. The review group's proposal that main panels and sub-panels should be encouraged to refer to quantitative indicators appropriate to their discipline was broadly supported in responses to the consultations, although strong doubts were expressed about the proposal for a 'research capacity assessment' driven by metrics. Sub-panels will accordingly be encouraged to work with main panels to specify datasets appropriate to their discipline. Our intention is that this will not require information to be collected from HEIs that is outside the standard requirement for submissions in the exercise, or is not already collected for another purpose.

Outcomes

49. The proposal for a new quality profile was strongly supported in responses to the consultations. The key advantages of this approach are that it will:

- a. Eliminate the 'cliff edge' effects of the previous rating scale, where comparatively fine judgements at the grade boundaries could have a disproportionate impact upon funding and reputation.
- b. Put an end to the 'averaging' effect of previous RAE grades. It will be possible to distinguish between departments whose work is of even quality and those where the quality is less even, and to highlight the presence of 'pockets of excellence'.
- c. Put an end to the situation, produced by the previous rating scale, where an HEI might consider leaving one or more established researchers out of a submission to ensure that it achieved a higher grade and possibly received more funding.

50. We have decided to have four starred levels of excellence rather than three as proposed in the review report. This is to provide the degree of discrimination that is likely to be required for funding, and bearing in mind that there will be no separate assessment of research capacity. In developing descriptors, we shall keep in mind the definitions for the top two starred levels proposed by the review group (roughly, the upper and lower half of the body of work that would have been defined as reaching 'international' levels of excellence in the 2001 RAE). The lower two starred levels will fit in below this and will probably cover between them the work that would have been classified as reaching 'national' levels of excellence in 2001.

51. The quality profiles will be criterion referenced. The proportions of work assigned by panels to each of the starred levels will reflect their judgement, within the terms of detailed level descriptors (currently being developed), with no external guidance on the overall

distribution of stars. The new panel structure will enable panels to interpret the level descriptors on a consistent basis across all disciplines.

52. Table 1 above illustrates how we envisage presenting the output of the assessment process. The wording in the headings would be subject to further consideration, and we would include the agreed definitions of the starred levels. We envisage that the proportions of activity will be shown in steps of at least 5 per cent, but this remains open for later decision.

53. The main panels and sub-panels will not rate or score individual researchers. This is in keeping with the strong majority endorsement of the review group's recommendation that 'star ratings' not be given to named individuals as a matter of principle.

54. The funding bodies, and the main panels and sub-panels, will of course comply fully with data protection legislation on subject access requests from individuals regarding data about them which is held or generated as part of the RAE process. When such requests are being met, clear guidance will be provided to the individual as to the nature and status of any data held. However, the RAE process will not provide for either sub-panels or main panels to reach collective judgements on the overall quality of a named individual's work and outputs, so no such collective judgements will be available to be disclosed.

Timetable and next steps

55. A provisional timetable for the exercise is set out in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Provisional timetable for 2008 RAE

March 2004	Consultation on panel structure and membership issued
July 2004	Panel structure announced and nominations for panel members invited
November 2004	Main panel and sub-panel members announced
June 2005	Guidance on submissions issued
August 2005	Draft criteria and working methods of main panels and sub-panels issued for consultation
November 2005	Final criteria and working methods of main panels and sub-panels issued
31 July 2007	End of assessment period (and cut-off point for publication of cited outputs)
31 October 2007	Census date
30 November 2007	Closing date for submissions
December 2008	Results published

56. As noted above, we are issuing a further document setting out proposals for consultation on the configuration of the main panels and sub-panels, and how their members should be appointed. We anticipate that main panels and sub-panels will be formed in the course of 2004 and meet for the first time early in 2005.

57. We are also moving immediately to appoint a team to run the exercise. As in previous exercises, the operational management will be undertaken by HEFCE under the guidance of a steering group drawn from all the funding bodies.

58. Subject to further consideration once the RAE management team has started its work, we envisage issuing a document in autumn 2004 setting out:

- detailed guidance on the content and format of submissions for assessment
- definitions of starred levels within the quality profile to be used in the exercise
- the definition of research to be used in the exercise
- guidance on the range of quantitative indicators that would be available for panels to refer to if they wish
- further guidance on equal opportunities issues
- any generic guidance we would expect all panels and sub-panels to follow in framing their criteria.

Regulatory impact and cost

59. We have undertaken a study of the regulatory impact of the exercise in the form now envisaged for 2008 – in terms both of the accountability principles proposed by the Better Regulation Review Group (BRRG) and of the accountability scorecard developed by HEFCE. This study will be published shortly on the RAE web-site: www.rae.ac.uk.

60. We have taken as a guiding principle the need to keep the administrative burden that the RAE places upon HEIs and their staff – and the cost to public funds – to a minimum compatible with the significance of the outcome and the scale of the resources that will be allocated using the RAE results. This reflects the strong concern, in the consultation responses and in advice from the BRRG, that viewed as a whole the review group's proposals could be unduly complex and burdensome in practice.

61. Expert review is by its nature a labour-intensive process, and each element added to the process to improve the 'fit' with particular disciplines and types of research activity will inevitably carry with it an increase in the overall cost and burden. In the last two exercises, we engaged around 1 per cent of the research-active community within UK HEIs to assess the research of their peers. Even with significant use of additional specialist advice, this proportion cannot guarantee that all recognised sub-disciplines will be represented by a leading practitioner among the assessors. Despite this difficulty, we recognise the need to respond to requests for amendments to the rules and criteria so that a range of sub-group behaviours and individual circumstances can receive due consideration. This has inevitably increased the complexity and cost of the undertaking.

62. Implementing the full proposals in the review group report would have meant a further increase in the scale and complexity of the exercise. What we now propose is a major national activity that could only reasonably be undertaken every few years, but which has to be undertaken in view of both the importance of research in higher education to key national

interests and the considerable sums of public money that the funding bodies will allocate for research over the following six years. Nonetheless we have scaled this down significantly from what the full review group proposals would have required. In developing a detailed plan and processes for 2008 we shall continue to enquire rigorously into the cost and benefits of each element in the exercise.

Costs of the exercise

63. Establishing the full costs of the RAE has proved an interesting challenge since the first exercise. Calculating the direct additional costs to the higher education funding bodies is comparatively straightforward. We know that for the 2001 exercise these came to some £5.6 million. The largest element in this total was costs related to panel meetings, including members' fees. However, the figure excludes the accommodation and support services provided by HEFCE. Taking account of inflation, and of the changes to assessment criteria and processes mentioned above, the direct costs incurred by the funding bodies in running the next exercise are likely to be around £10 million. The exact cost will depend upon a number of key factors, in particular how fees paid to main panel and sub-panel members are determined and what arrangements are made to secure an input from international assessors.

64. Calculating the cost to HEIs has proved more problematic. It is possible to estimate the time that academic staff engaged in the assessment exercise are not available to carry out their normal academic duties, and to calculate this as an opportunity cost. It is also possible to estimate the amount of academic and administrative staff time devoted to preparing submissions for assessment. But here we run into difficult questions about how much of this work a well managed HEI or research department would undertake in any case (for example, keeping departmental and institutional research plans up to date, and maintaining information about the research activity and outputs of individual staff).

65. There is some evidence that the amount of work that individual HEIs have judged necessary in preparing their submissions has varied significantly within each previous exercise; and that some institutions consider the additional effort will yield benefits that go beyond the cash value of any grant they may receive as a result of the RAE. For example, participation in the RAE is regarded by some as a clear public statement that a department has plans to maintain and develop its research activities, even if it has attracted little or no research funding in the most recent round.

66. A survey of the costs to the sector of the 1996 exercise, based upon returns from colleagues in HEIs, produced an estimate of some £30 million. A later study of costs was carried out in one research-intensive HEI (published in HEFCE 00/36). This produced an estimate (including opportunity costs) of £37.5 million for all HEIs in England – or 0.8 per cent of the total funds allocated on the basis of the RAE's results. We consider that these estimates reflect the amount of work that HEIs need to undertake for the exercise, over and above what might otherwise be expected of a well-managed institution, and that the costs to HEIs of our planned approach in 2008 will not be radically different.

67. The results of the next exercise will probably be used to allocate some £8 billion of research funding across a six-year period. If the total cost were £45 million, this would

represent around 0.6 per cent of the resources allocated, comparing very favourably with the costs associated with project-based grant allocations using expert review. We believe that costs on this scale are further justified by the importance of maintaining an excellent and sustainable national research base, and by the broader role of the exercise in assuring and driving up quality.

Equal opportunities

68. We are committed to ensuring that our policies and practices fully reflect current legislation and best practice in relation to equal opportunities. This will be a fundamental principle underlying the design and conduct of the next RAE. We have already had some helpful discussions with the Equality Challenge Unit on a range of issues. We wish to ensure that institutions are encouraged to submit for assessment all their researchers whose work meets the required standard; and that the main panels and sub-panels pay attention to equal opportunities issues in interpreting and establishing quality profiles for the submissions.

69. Consequently:

- a. Main panel and sub-panel members and secretaries, and the RAE management team, will receive all necessary training and guidance on equal opportunities issues.
- b. Main panels and sub-panels will be required to ensure that institutions and departments can take full account of equal opportunities issues in preparing their submissions, in full confidence that this will not have a negative impact upon the outcome. This is likely to include making provision for institutions to identify cases where an individual researcher's personal circumstances have affected his or her productivity and personal development as shown in the submission.
- c. Institutions will be required to confirm that they have developed and applied an appropriate internal code of practice in preparing their submissions and in selecting staff for inclusion in these. They will be asked to certify that this code has been communicated to their staff. This will remove any doubt that institutions are expected to respect principles of equality of opportunity in constructing RAE submissions.

70. Further guidance will be provided as needed.

Key risks

71. Four key risks to the successful delivery of the exercise have been identified. These and the measures in place to mitigate them are outlined below:

- a. That the results fail to win the confidence of the sector or of Government. We have mitigated this through consultation (including provision to consult later on the subject criteria for assessment); by retaining expert review at the heart of the RAE process; and by each funding body taking the lead in explaining the detail of the RAE process to its governmental stakeholders.

b. That the exercise is impeded or collapses following failure of our systems and procedures. We are addressing this through careful and detailed project planning, drawing upon experience in bringing three previous exercises on a similar scale to a successful conclusion. The generous planning time built into the programme, and the increased scope for using technology to speed up and simplify the processes, will also help.

c. That there are well-founded challenges to RAE decisions, including legal challenge. Since the judicial review case following the 1992 RAE (which found in favour of the funding bodies) we have increasingly strived to ensure that the RAE procedures are sound, transparent and followed rigorously by the panels. We shall do no less in the next exercise and will take precautionary legal advice as necessary.

d. That the HE sector withdraws its co-operation, in relation either to making submissions for assessment at all or to the availability of HEI staff as panel members. The impact of either would be high; but we rate the probability as low or very low bearing in mind the sums of public money riding on the outcome, and the general perception that the outcomes of previous exercises were robust and well-founded.

Glossary

Assessment period	The period during which research outputs must be placed in the public domain if they are to qualify for assessment in RAE2008. The assessment period runs from 1 January 2001 to 31 July 2007.
Census date	The date determining the affiliation of research staff to a particular institution. (Staff may be submitted to the RAE by the institution by which they are employed on this date, regardless of previous or forthcoming changes in their employment status.) The census date will be 31 October 2007.
Department	The staff included in a submission to one of the 70 or so discrete units of assessment recognised by the RAE, and, by extension, their work and the structures which support it. RAE departments are often not identified with a single administrative unit within a university or college.
Eligible staff	Staff who can be shown to have undertaken significant autonomous research, or otherwise to have made a significant independent research contribution to the research output of a unit or department.
Expert review	Assessment of outputs by experts in the discipline. Most will be active researchers but, in some cases, research users who are not currently active researchers will participate in the assessment.
Funding bodies	The four UK funding bodies for higher education: the Higher Education Funding Councils for England, Scotland and Wales, and the Department of Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland.
Joint submission	The collaborative work of two or more institutions in a single subject area, submitted in a single submission to a single unit of assessment.
Main panel	A group of expert researchers representing a broad discipline area. Main panels are responsible for finalising quality profiles for submissions in the discipline groups they cover, and for ensuring consistency of approach between their sub-panels.
Metrics	Quantitative data collected by institutions in relation to the volume and uses of research inputs and outputs.
Panel	Generic term covering both main panels and sub-panels.
Practice-based research	Research in which knowledge is generated through professional practice.
Quality profile	The results of each submission's assessment – replacing the rating used in previous RAEs. The quality profile shows the proportion of overall research activity described in a submission that meets each of four defined levels of quality (one, two, three and four star).
Research activity	The totality of the research and research-related activities reported in a submission. Research activity includes the

	conduct, management and dissemination of research.
Research output	The outcome of a research process, presented in the public domain.
Results	The starred quality profiles and associated findings published by the funding bodies according to the findings of RAE panels.
Submission	The complete set of information provided to the RAE by a department within a unit of assessment.
Sub-panel	One of around 70 groups of expert assessors representing a discrete discipline area. Sub-panels are responsible for the preliminary assessment of submissions and for providing recommendations on starred quality profiles to main panels.
Unit of assessment	One of around 70 discipline areas to which RAE submissions may be made by institutions.