




# From RAE to REF: Assessment and Evaluation of Research in UK Universities



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## The RAE: a brief history

Research Selectivity Exercise	1986
Research Assessment Exercise	1989
	1992
	1996
	2001
	2008
Research Excellence Framework	?

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## Motivations: Government

- Method of allocating funds on the basis of quality
- Increasing accountability
- Improving value for money
- Rewarding and incentivising good performance
- Improved institutional management
- Improving levels of output
- Encourages competition
- Part of “an assessment culture”
- Concentration of funding

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## Motivations: Universities

- Sustaining expensive subjects
- Rewarding performance
- Restructuring
- Competition
- Concentration of activities
- Diversification between institutions

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## RAE in practice

- **Outline of procedures – information, peer review, outcomes**
- **Principles - transparency, credibility, simplicity, fairness**
- **Some key issues - pure and applied research, comparability across disciplines (of methods and outcomes), the evaluators, active or non-active staff, young researchers, equal opportunities, interdisciplinary research, “international” quality**

## Tactics

- Active or non-active
- Grade or volume
- Publications – where and when
- Sources of income – which ones
- What sort of research – pure and applied, long-term or short-term
- Which unit of assessment
- The transfer market



## Impact on Research Management

- Senior management – senior officers, research committees
- Research strategies – concentration of activities, targets (grades, returns, people), new investments, disinvestment
- Decision making – speed of response, flat decision-making structures
- Performance – performance indicators, external review, preparations
- Organisational units – critical mass
- Research support – applications, funding, publications
- Resource allocation – transparency
- Human resource management – leadership, management
- Staffing – recruitment (junior and senior), retention, staff development, promotions, salaries, rewards,

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## Pressures for Change

From RAE to REF – was it all an accident?

Move towards profiles rather than grades (but has 5\* been replaced by the grade point average?)

Move towards measurement of impact – much debate

Increasing objectivity – increasing use of metrics (but many reservations)

Overarching panels to ensure consistency of approach

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## RAE – some final thoughts

- **Positive** - new research culture, improved research management, strong outputs (UK research is successful), rewards for good researchers, more transparency, allowed new institutions to develop research
- **Negative** - an end in itself, distorting good research, too expensive (?), game-playing

## Funding

Owens College, Manchester 1873

Subscribers – 27 cotton merchants, 4 Engineers, 4 calico printers, 3 gentry, 1 tea dealer, wire manufacturer, blockmaker, banker, card manufacturer, warehouseman (each £300-£1000)

Fees – private (4 shillings-4 pounds)

Individuals, local councils, employers, charities

## Change and economic Development

Yorkshire Post 1893

“When one compares the character of the trades of Leeds and the district of two decades ago with what it is at the present day and considers that many of the most important mills in the locality are supervised by Yorkshire College men, it becomes evident that the instruction imparted in that institution has in no small degree benefited the weaving industries of the city and neighbourhood. There has been a complete change in the classes and styles of fabrics made in the district since the textile department of the college commenced work. Some years ago Leeds was noted for its production of plain textures: now fancy fabrics both of woollen and worsted materials in very extensive varieties are made in the neighbourhood”

## Some thoughts

**1870-1914 domination of part-time over full-time – have universities become over-obsessed with full-time programmes?**

**Use of evenings and weekends – making better use of our facilities**

**Professional development – have the research universities turned their back on CPD? Is this changing?**

**Active involvement of local employers in course design and delivery; have universities lost their local roots?**

**Local recognition and local support**

**Funding – private**

**No Government involvement**

## Questions of Status

### **Oxford Broadsheet (1914)**

**“He gets degrees in making jam  
At Liverpool and Birmingham”**

THANK YOU

## THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION: SOME FURTHER THOUGHTS

Some implications:

### Organisational structures:

- beware of over-devolution
- flexibility
- inter/trans/cross disciplinary
- confidence
- new programmes

### Institutions:

- reduced number (but difficult to implement and costly)
- concentration of research (humanities and social sciences)
- much more targeted funding (places more pressure on institutions to manage resources)
- awareness of market positions
- management of performance

Overall, higher education will be a key driver of the knowledge economy and universities will still be in place, but in a world of even greater competition. Governments will not let go, because higher education now has a political importance.

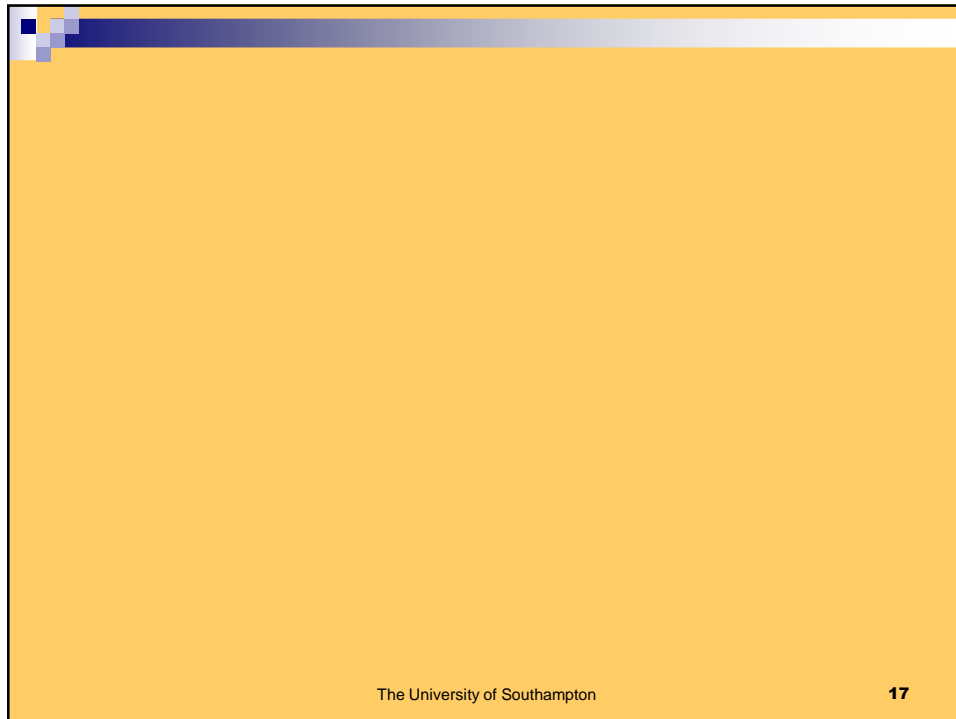
## THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION: A FINAL THOUGHT

Institutional cultures (based on McNay)

	<i>Vision</i>	<i>Control</i>	<i>Implementation</i>
Collegial	Weak	Weak	Weak
Bureaucratic	Weak	Strong	Weak
Corporate	Strong	Strong	Weak
Entrepreneurial	Strong	Weak	Strong

**Key messages:**

**DIRECTION, FLEXIBILITY, IMAGINATION**



## Internal Management of Research

- Organisation/strategy
- Selectivity/research clusters
- Performance management
- Incentives – funding, leave, research students
- Staff development