

May 2003/22

**Consultation**

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Responses should be sent by e-mail  
by Tuesday 30 September 2003

Following the outcome of the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise, the four funding bodies for UK higher education commissioned Sir Gareth Roberts to review the future of research assessment. This document contains the final report and recommendations of that review, plus a joint consultation by the funding bodies on the recommendations that relate to the process of assessment.

# Joint consultation on the review of research assessment

## Consultation by the UK funding bodies on the review by Sir Gareth Roberts

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

## Joint consultation on the review of research assessment

To	Heads of publicly-funded higher education institutions in the United Kingdom Other interested organisations and individuals
Of interest to those responsible for	Research, Quality, Funding
Reference	2003/22
Publication date	May 2003
Enquiries to	Tom Sastry tel 0117 931 7458 e-mail t.sastry@hefce.ac.uk

### Executive summary

#### Purpose

1. Following the outcome of the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise, the four funding bodies for UK higher education commissioned Sir Gareth Roberts to review the future of research assessment. This document contains the final report and recommendations of that review, and seeks views on the recommendations that relate to the process of assessment.

#### Key points

2. The consultation is UK-wide. The funding bodies have not yet taken a view on any of the recommendations of the review. Each body will consider its response once this consultation has been completed.

3. The funding bodies aim to be able to agree on a common approach to research assessment following this consultation. They will each take an independent view on research funding.

#### Action required

4. Responses should be made using the form at Annex A, which can be downloaded from the web ([www.ra-review.ac.uk](http://www.ra-review.ac.uk)). They should be returned by e-mail to [responses@ra-review.ac.uk](mailto:responses@ra-review.ac.uk) by **Tuesday 30 September 2003**.

## Introduction

5. Sir Gareth Roberts was commissioned by the four UK funding bodies (the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland) to report on the future for research assessment in the United Kingdom.

6. The funding councils are extremely grateful to Sir Gareth for his work and in particular for the energy he has put into consulting the sector and its stakeholders. The review has been built on the foundation of some 420 responses to its 'Invitation to contribute', and over 40 meetings held across the UK.

## Issues for consultation

7. The review raises a number of issues on which the funding councils now seek the views of their stakeholders. This consultation document, which is UK-wide, consults only on those recommendations relevant to the process of assessment.

8. This document does not constitute a 'funding councils' response' to the review, nor have the funding councils yet taken a view on any of its recommendations. Each funding council will consider its response once this consultation has been completed.

9. Two related consultation documents are to be issued shortly:

- 'Improving standards in postgraduate research degree programmes: formal consultation' will be published by the UK funding bodies, and be available from HEFCE
- 'Sustainability of university research: consultation on reforming parts of the dual support system' will be published by the Office of Science and Technology.

10. The review of research assessment contains 16 recommendations. Of these, we are now asking for views on recommendations 1-10, which address fundamental aspects of the research assessment process. We have decided not to consult on other specific recommendations in the review, on the grounds that they fall into the following categories:

- recommendations 11 and 12 refer to *funding policy options* which will remain a matter for each funding body acting separately
- recommendations 13 and 14 refer to the *administration of a future exercise*. This will be a matter to be resolved once the funding councils have considered responses to this consultation and announced their approach to research assessment
- recommendations 15 and 16 refer to the *process for taking final decisions* on the implementation of these recommendations rather than to the future of research assessment itself. The funding bodies will take appropriate professional advice and will consider responses to the consultation before announcing their policy on a future research assessment.

11. The first of these reasons also applies to recommendation 5, only a part of which has been included in the consultation question.

12. In addition to consulting on recommendations 1-10, we have also asked four further cross-cutting questions, seeking views on:

- the implications of the review's recommendations for the burden on institutions
- the implications of the review's recommendations for progress towards equality of opportunity for all staff in HE – regardless of age, sexual orientation, political belief, disability, gender, race or religion
- the purposes for which research is assessed
- the overall approach taken by the review to the question of research assessment.

13. The funding bodies aim to be able to agree on a common approach to research assessment following this consultation. They will each take an independent view on research funding.

14. We have invited respondents to do two things: first to answer a 'closed' question indicating whether (and to what extent) they agree with the recommendations; and second, if they wish, to provide more detailed comments explaining their position. We are particularly keen to receive detailed comments from those expressing opposition to a recommendation, outlining alternatives where possible. The method we have adopted will provide us with quantitative information on the acceptability of each proposal and qualitative information which we can use to gain a richer understanding of what lies behind the response.

## Responses

15. A response form is attached as Annex A, which can be downloaded from the web ([www.ra-review.ac.uk](http://www.ra-review.ac.uk)). Please send completed responses as a Word attachment **by e-mail** to [responses@ra-review.ac.uk](mailto:responses@ra-review.ac.uk). The closing date is **30 September 2003**.

16. Responses from individuals and organisations based in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will be forwarded to the relevant funding council for analysis. Responses from bodies with a UK-wide remit or from overseas respondents will be included in the analyses undertaken by all four funding bodies. The funding councils acting collectively will report on the similarities and differences between the views expressed by stakeholders in each territory, and will take all views into account before reaching collective decisions.

17. Please make it clear at the top of the response on whose behalf it has been submitted. In particular, please indicate whether it represents the corporate view of the institution, organisation or grouping or the private view of an individual or group of individuals.

18. Responses should include the details (name, phone number and e-mail address) of someone we can contact if we have any queries about the response.

19. We regret that it will not be possible to reply or provide feedback to individual respondents.

20. We will assume that all respondents consent to the publication of their response. If you wish your response, or any part of it, to remain confidential, this must be clearly indicated both in the covering e-mail and the front page of the response itself.

## **Further information**

21. Copies of this report are available on the web at [www.ra-review.ac.uk](http://www.ra-review.ac.uk), or in hard copy from [publications@hefce.ac.uk](mailto:publications@hefce.ac.uk). If you have any queries about the consultation, please contact Tom Sastry ([t.sastry@hefce.ac.uk](mailto:t.sastry@hefce.ac.uk)). If, however, your query relates to the handling of consultation responses or other issues relating to the Roberts review by SHEFC, HEFCW or DEL it should be addressed to one of the following:

SHEFC: Gill Davenport ([Gill.Davenport@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:Gill.Davenport@sfc.ac.uk))  
HEFCW: Ann Hughes ([hughesa@elwa.ac.uk](mailto:hughesa@elwa.ac.uk))  
DEL: Gavin Campbell ([gavin.campbell@delni.gov.uk](mailto:gavin.campbell@delni.gov.uk))

**Annex A**

**Review of research assessment: response form**

**Copies of this form are available for download from the web, [www.ra-review.ac.uk](http://www.ra-review.ac.uk), with this document. Please complete and return as a Word attachment to an e-mail, to [responses@ra-review.ac.uk](mailto:responses@ra-review.ac.uk). The deadline for responses is 30 September 2003.**

Response by (name of person or organisation):.....

Corporate response (representing the views of the group or organisation): Yes/No

Private response (representing the views of one or more individuals): Yes/No

Contact in case of queries:

Name: .....

Tel: .....

e-mail:.....

**Recommendation 1 (see paragraphs 113-116 of the review)**

Any system of research assessment designed to identify the best research must be based upon the judgement of experts who may, if they choose, employ performance indicators to inform their judgement.

Do you agree or disagree with recommendation 1? Place a cross beside the appropriate answer:

- Strongly agree ...
- Agree ...
- Neither agree nor disagree ...
- Disagree ...
- Strongly disagree ...

Comments on recommendation 1:

**Recommendation 2 (see paragraphs 117-126 of the review)**

- a. There should be a six-year cycle.
- b. There should be a light-touch 'mid-point monitoring'. This would be designed only to highlight significant changes in the volume of activity in each unit.
- c. The next assessment process should take place in 2007-8.

Do you agree or disagree with recommendation 2? Please indicate your views using the grid below:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Point a					
Point b					
Point c					

Comments on recommendation 2:

**Recommendation 3 (see paragraphs 127-133 of the review)**

- a. There should be an institution-level assessment of research competences, undertaken approximately two years before the main assessment.
- b. The competences to be assessed should be institutional research strategy, development of researchers, equal opportunities, and dissemination beyond the peer group.
- c. An institution failing its assessment against any one of the competencies would be allowed to enter the next research assessment but would not receive funding on the basis of its performance in that assessment until it had demonstrated a satisfactory performance.

Do you agree or disagree with recommendation 3? Please indicate your views using the grid below:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Point a					
Point b					
Point c					

Comments on recommendation 3:

**Recommendation 4 (see paragraphs 134-155 of the review)**

- a. There should, in principle, be a multi-track assessment enabling the intensiveness of the assessment activity (and potentially the degree of risk) to be proportionate to the likely benefit.
- b. The least research intensive institutions should be considered separately from the remainder of the HE sector.
- c. The form of the assessment of the least research intensive institutions would be a matter for the relevant funding council.
- d. The less competitive work in the remainder of institutions should be assessed by proxy measures against a threshold standard.
- e. The most competitive work should be assessed using an expert review assessment similar to the old Research Assessment Exercise.

Do you agree or disagree with recommendation 4? Please indicate your views using the grid below:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Point a					
Point b					
Point c					
Point d					
Point e					

Comments on recommendation 4:

**Recommendation 5 (see paragraphs 156-171 of the review)**

- a. The output of the Research Quality Assessment should be a 'quality profile' indicating the quantum of 'one star', 'two star' and 'three star' research in each submission. It will not be the role of the assessment to reduce this profile to summary metrics or grades.
- b. As a matter of principle, star ratings would not be given to named individuals, nor would the profile be published if the submission were sufficiently small that individual performance could be inferred from it.
- c. Panels would be given guidelines on expected proportions of three star, two star and one star ratings. These proportions should normally be the same for each unit of assessment. If a panel awarded grades which were more or less generous than anticipated in the guidelines, these grades would have to be confirmed through moderation.<sup>1</sup>

Do you agree or disagree with recommendation 5? Please indicate your views using the grid below:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Point a					
Point b					
Point c					

Comments on recommendation 5:

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<sup>1</sup> This consultation question reflects an edited version of recommendation 5. The recommendation in the review report also states that 'the funding councils should provide institutions with details of the relative value, in funding terms, of one star, two star, and three star research, and of research fundable through the Research Capacity Assessment in advance of the assessment. These ratios might vary between disciplines.' In the event that the review recommendations are accepted, each funding council will develop its own policies for reflecting the assessment results in funding, taking proper account of Sir Gareth's recommendation.

**Recommendation 6 (see paragraphs 172-197 of the review)**

- a. There should be between 20 and 25 units of assessment panels supported by around 60 sub-panels. Panels and sub-panels should be supported by colleges of assessors with experience of working in designated multidisciplinary ‘thematic’ areas.
- b. Each panel should have a chair and a moderator. The role of the moderator would be to ensure consistency of practice across the sub-panels within the unit of assessment.
- c. Each panel should include a number of non-UK based researchers with experience of the UK research system.
- d. The moderators of adjacent panels should meet in five or six ‘super-panels’ whose role would be to ensure consistency of practice between panels. These ‘super-panels’ should be chaired by senior moderators who would be individuals with extensive experience in research.

Do you agree or disagree with recommendation 6? Please indicate your views using the grid below:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Point a					
Point b					
Point c					
Point d					

Comments on recommendation 6:

**Recommendation 7 (see paragraphs 198-204 of the review)**

- a. The rule that each researcher may only submit up to four items of research output should be abolished. Research Quality Assessment panels should have the freedom to define their own limits on the number and/or size of research outputs associated with each researcher or group.
- b. Research Quality Assessment panels should ensure that their criteria statements enable them to guarantee that practice-based and applicable research are assessed according to criteria which reflect the characteristics of excellence in those types of research in those disciplines.

Do you agree or disagree with recommendation 7? Please indicate your views using the grid below:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Point a					
Point b					

Comments on recommendation 7:

**Recommendation 8 (see paragraphs 205-213 of the review)**

- a. The funding councils should work alongside the subject communities and the research councils to develop discipline-specific performance indicators.
- b. Performance against these indicators should be calculated a year prior to the exercise, and institutions advised of their performance relative to other institutions.
- c. The weight placed upon these indicators as well as their nature should be allowed to vary between panels.

Do you agree or disagree with recommendation 8? Please indicate your views using the grid below:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Point a					
Point b					
Point c					

Comments on recommendation 8:

**Recommendation 9 (see paragraphs 214-234 of the review)**

- a. Where an institution submits to Research Quality Assessment in a sub-unit of assessment all staff in that sub-unit should become ineligible for the Research Capacity Assessment, even if they are not included in the Research Quality Assessment submission.
- b. The funding councils should establish and promote a facility for work to be submitted as the output of a group rather than an individual where appropriate.
- c. The funding councils should consider what measures could be taken to make joint submission more straightforward for institutions.
- d. Where an institution submits a sub-unit of assessment for Research Quality Assessment, no fewer than 80% of the qualified staff contracted to undertake research within the sub-unit of assessment must be included in the submission.
- e. All staff eligible to apply for grants from the research councils should be eligible for submission to Research Quality Assessment.

Do you agree or disagree with recommendation 9? Please indicate your views using the grid below:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Point a					
Point b					
Point c					
Point d					
Point e					

Comments on recommendation 9:

**Recommendation 10 (see paragraphs 235-238 of the review)**

Each panel should consider a research strategy statement outlining the institution's plans for research at unit level.

Do you agree or disagree with recommendation 10? Place a cross beside the appropriate answer:

- Strongly agree ...
- Agree ...
- Neither agree nor disagree ...
- Disagree ...
- Strongly disagree ...

Comments on recommendation 10:

**Question 11 Burden for institutions**

The review proposals have been designed to make the burden of assessment proportionate with the possibility of financial reward. Do you agree that this has been achieved? Place a cross by the appropriate answer:

- Strongly agree ...
- Agree ...
- Neither agree nor disagree ...
- Disagree ...
- Strongly disagree ...

Comments on question 11 – burden for institutions:

**Question 12 Value of research assessment**

What value do you place on the research assessment if the financial reward is likely to be small? Place a cross by the appropriate answer:

- High                    ...
- Medium                ...
- Low                     ...

Comments on question 12 – value of research assessment:

**Question 13 Equality of opportunity for all groups of staff**

The funding councils wish to promote equality of opportunity for all staff regardless of age, sexual orientation, political belief, disability, gender, race or religion and seek to ensure that its research assessment policies are compatible with this objective. How successful do you consider that the proposals of the research assessment review are in this respect? Place a cross by the appropriate answer:

- Very successful ...
- Successful ...
- Neither successful nor unsuccessful ...
- Unsuccessful ...
- Very unsuccessful ...

Comments on question 13 – equality of opportunity for all groups of staff:



**Question 15 Further comments**

Question 15 – any further comments: