Research concentration and excellence

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The Benefits of Research

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Research within the HE sector is vital for

- Generating new knowledge and understanding
- Education, training and continuing professional development of highly-skilled people
- Capacity building in new and emerging disciplines & sustaining progression in well established areas
- The development of new or improved products and services
- Establishment of new businesses
- New or improved public policy and public services
- Attracting inward investment from global business

Conservative &Liberal Democrat policy

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- “Britain’s world-class science and engineering base will underpin a successful high-tech economy. We will allocate a multi-year science and research budget to provide a stable investment climate for Research Councils” – Conservative manifesto

- “Britain’s future depends on a vibrant research base and the ability of innovators to exploit the country’s intellectual capital to generate new home-grown high-tech industries” – Liberal Democrat manifesto

- “We will respect the convention that the Science Budget, once allocated through the Comprehensive Spending Review process, is not used for other purposes” - Liberal Democrat manifesto

The need for maintaining broad investment

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"We need to maintain a broad base in science because we don't know where the challenges are going to come from...and because the synergies from a broad based excellence in science promote world-class leadership and interdisciplinary breakthroughs. Only with a diverse range of skills and deep reservoirs of knowledge will we have the flexibility to provide the expertise required in different fields" – Lord Drayson

Selective research funding

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Higher Ambitions (2009)

"A key asset in attracting researchers and maintaining the critical mass of our research activity is our clear public commitment to science and research. Stable government funding and support provides an essential foundation for the science and research base to plan and grow."

"In a more challenging climate for research, with tighter fiscal constraints and increased competition from other countries, we will need to carefully protect the excellence of our research base. This will require a greater focus on world-class research and greater recognition of the potential benefits of research concentration in key areas..limited resources mean that public investment in the UK must be prioritised on strengthening research centres with world-class capability."

UK university research funding

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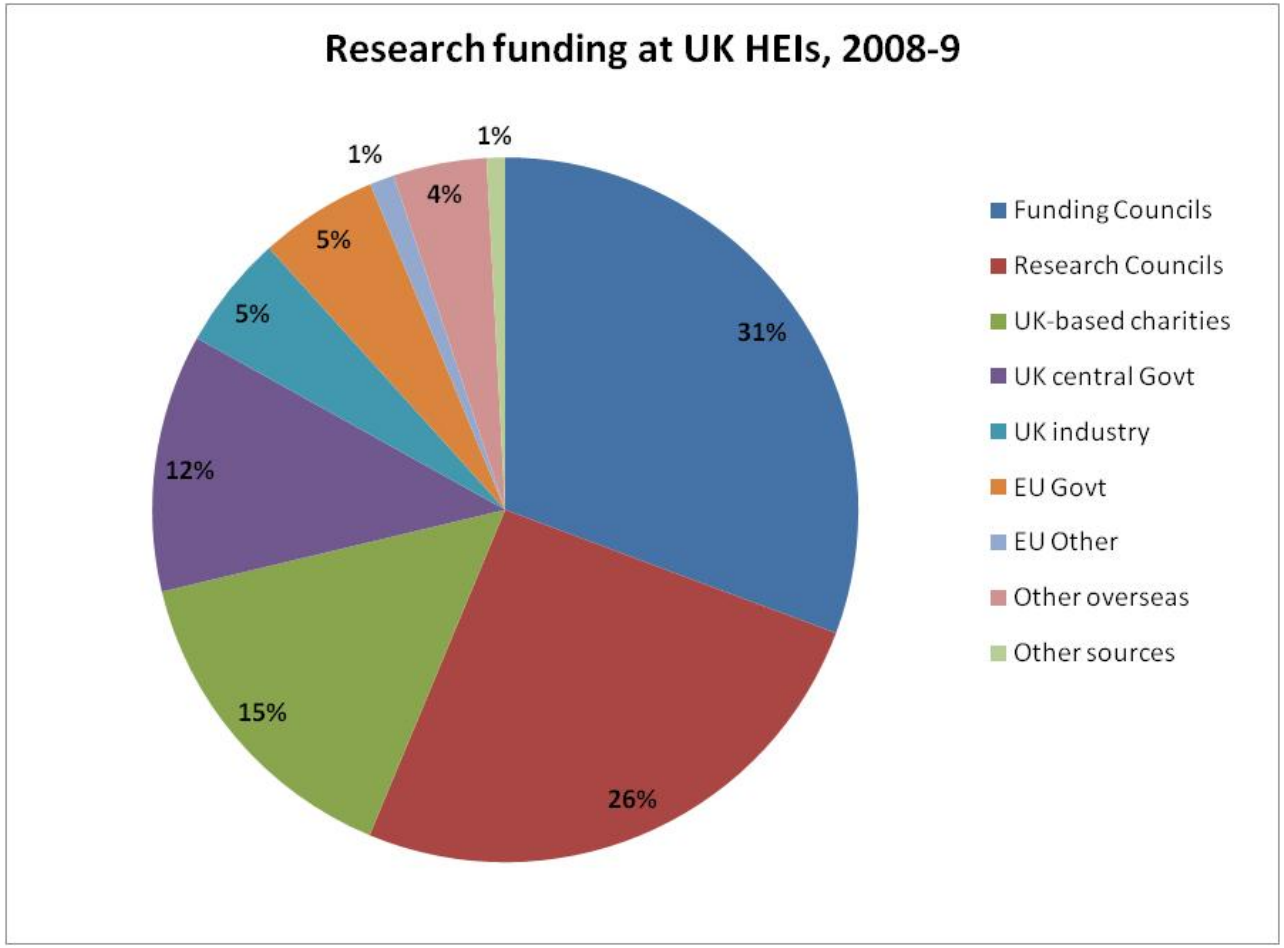
Total investment in university research by Government = ~£6bn



Current Concentration

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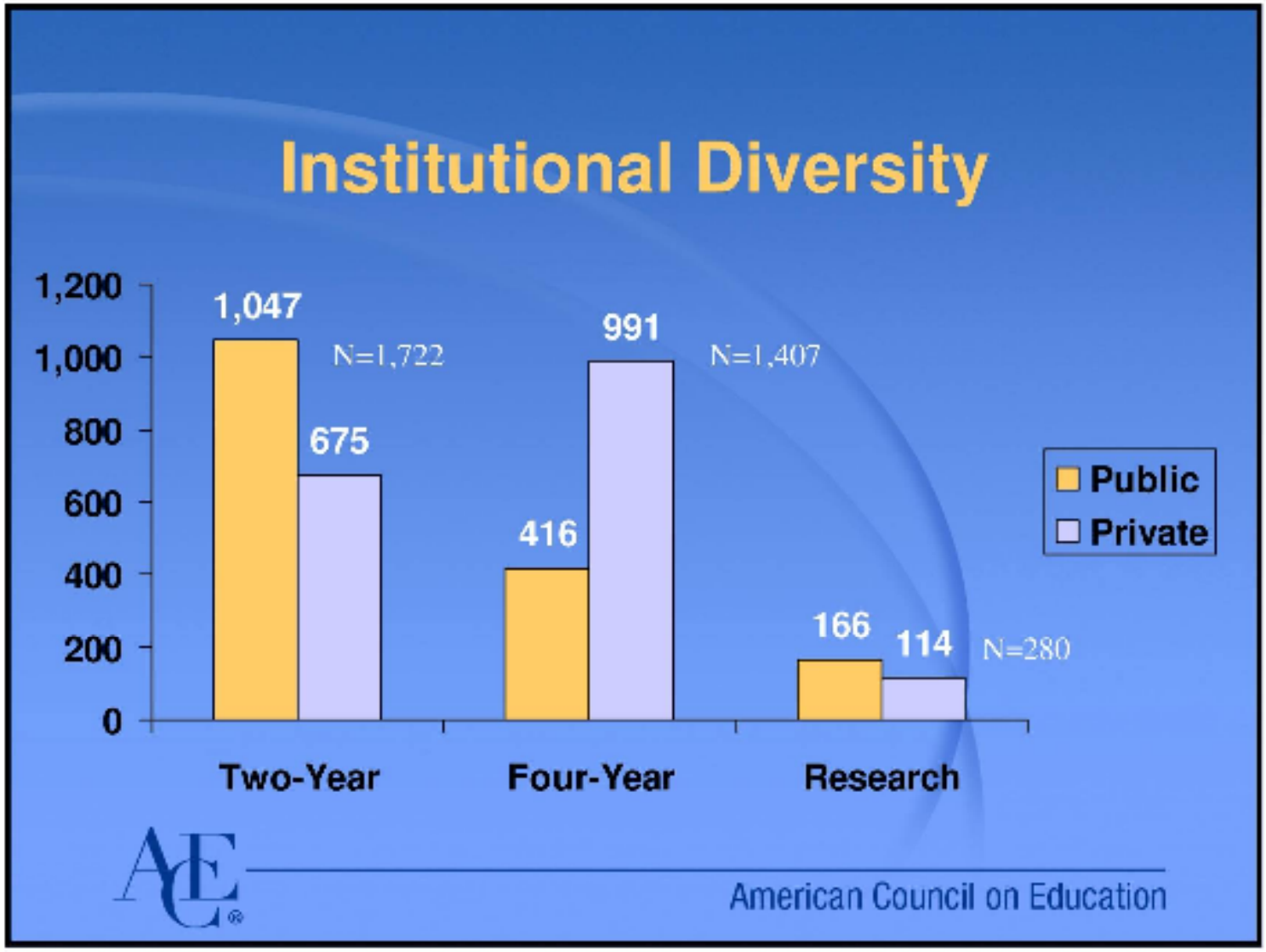
- Strong indicators of research funding with 80+% of competitive peer review funding and QR goes to around 30 institutions.

- Evidence suggests that other funding e.g. charity, business tends to correlate with the other research funding indicators.

- Research concentration tends have some subject dependence being stronger in Chemistry, Mechanical Engineering and less so in Humanities.


Institutional Diversity
1,200
1,000
800
600
400
200
0
1,047
675
N=1,722
991
416
N=1,407
166
114
N=280
Public
Private
Two-Year
Four-Year
Research
American Council on Education

Challenges for Research and its Funding in HE

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- International competition
- Changing nature of research and scale of research challenges
- Accelerate innovation
- Financial environment

Challenges and Ways Ahead

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The sector must be bold and seek radical alternatives

- Good internal management and concentration of resources

- Look for regional solutions
  (a) Pooling initiatives in Scotland (e.g. SUPA, WestChem, EastChem, etc.)
  (b) Science Cities in AWM West Midlands region
  (c) White Rose consortium, building on complementary institutional strengths e.g. Virtual centre for low carbon futures research

- New models of national coordination of infrastructure

- Play into international consortia where it makes sense without diluting UK brand and fundamental strength in research