A Short History of Research Assessment in the UK

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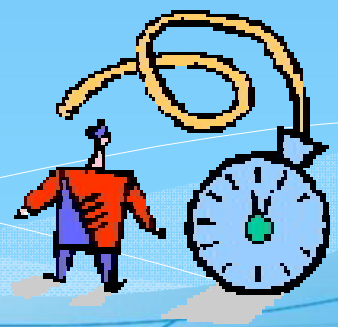
(see P. Gilroy & O. McNamara: A critical history of research assessment in the United Kingdom and its post-1992 impact on Education, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 35:4, 2009, pp.321-335)



Pre- 1986

* All universities receive a research grant as part of their block grant from the UGC
* Based on student numbers, regardless of the amount or quality of research
* The larger the university the larger the research grant

1986: The First Exercise

- The Research Selectivity Exercise (RSE) - Partly a response to the need for public accountability to show value for money
- UGC on horns of a dilemma (resist government pressure OR alienate their academic community)
- A *quid pro quo* for releasing more funds to the sector in return for a form of light touch academic appraisal
- HEIs had to complete a short questionnaire and include 5 exemplars of departments' research outputs
- Note move from funding HEI to funding departments/cost centres + 3-point grading scale which was subject-specific

1989: The Second Exercise

* Consultation replaced 50 Cost Centres with 152 UoAs, introduced 5-point rating scale
* Academics to identify their 2 best publications, with p-g-r numbers and research income required centrally
* Subject committees replaced with 70 peer review panels
* UFC's evaluation = publication data was unreliable and quality left unclear

Problem =What to collect and what measurement to use?

1992: The Third Exercise

- The ‘new’ universities joined the game, but not all staff contracts specified research, so introduced concept of ‘research active’ (and non-active) staff
- 72 UoAs, with ‘research active’ staff identifying 2 publications and listing other publications
- 5-point grading system
- 91% of the research funding went to the ‘old’ HEIs

1996: The Fourth Exercise

- Consultation resulted in research active staff offering 4 outputs and esteem indicators, graded on a 7-point scale (1, 2, 3b, 3a, 4, 5 & 5*)
- 69 UoAs and transparent process for panel membership and criteria
- 40% increase in post-1992 university submissions, outnumbering the 'old' sector, but as funding allocated in a non-linear way (5* received four times a 3b's funding) – very high research selectivity resulted in post-92s receiving little real funding

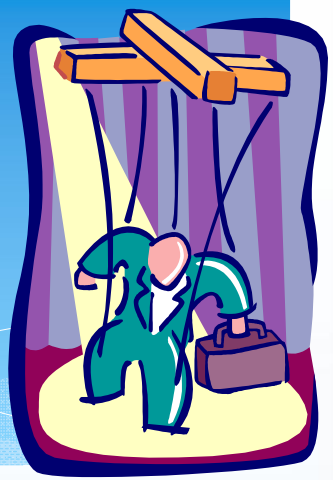
HEFCE Warning in 2000

‘Unless there is extra money from Government to reward any continuing general improvement in research ratings in the 2001 RAE, funding will have to be more selective.’

2001: The Fifth Exercise

- Initially the same grade system, but subsequently a new 6* grade identified (for 1996 5* UoAs)
- Sir Howard Newby stated that 3As would be funded then had to withdraw that funding promise
- Research capability funding introduced
- Major exercise –submissions from 173 HEIs, 50,000 researchers involved, so very resource intensive

2008: The Sixth Exercise



- Developed the 2001 RAE further, with the key difference being the Quality Profile which meant individual academics were no longer judged (other than by their department)
- Research selective + very resource intensive
- Government interference:

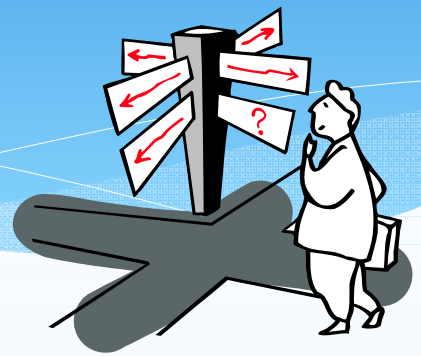
  (1) White Paper 2003 = need to steer 'non-research-intensive universities' away from research) strongly rebuffed by HEFCE

  (2) Brown Budget 2006 = replace RAE '08 with a metrics system

A Work in Progress

YEAR	UoAS	SCALE
1986	50	3
1989	152	5
1992	72	5
1996	69	7
2001	69	7/8
2008	67	5
2014	36	5

2014: The Seventh Exercise



Ever more:

Selective

Transparent

Controlling

Resource intensive

Pressure remains on HEFCE to work with the government and yet operate a process that has legitimacy with the academic community