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## The value of bibliometric measures



# The RAE: measuring academic research

The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) is the principal method used in the UK to establish the quality of the research undertaken in the higher education sector. Conducted jointly by the UK's four principal funding bodies - the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Scottish Funding Council, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland - it is an exercise based on peer review and aims to produce quality profiles for each submission of research activity made by an institution. Any higher education institution eligible to receive research funding from one of these funding bodies is eligible to participate in the exercise. It has taken place in its present form in 1986, 1992, 1996 and 2001, in which year a more rigorous exercise was carried out.

Traditionally, the RAE's main objective has been to allow funding bodies to assess the quality of research arising from the investment of public funds. It is used as a means for the academic sector to assess its success and prepare its future strategy. As such, the RAE introduces an incentive to individuals and institutions to improve their research performance and, unlike other forms of review and assessment in higher education, it has retained a good degree of support among academic staff.

The 2008 RAE will be based on the same principles of peer review as in previous years. For the purpose of this year's assessment, each academic discipline is assigned to one of 67 units of assessment (UOA). Work submitted is then assessed against the published criteria by an expert panel drawn from higher education institutions and the wider research community. The results will be published as a graded profile for each UOA for each submission.

### RAE versus REF

After 2008, the UK intends to change the way research quality is evaluated to a more statistics-based system. The main reasons put forth by the Higher Education Funding Council for England for this change are that the RAE is expensive and burdensome for the participating institutions. It is expected that bibliometrics will be central to judging research quality in this new system. The proposed method, known as the Research Excellence Framework (REF), will therefore rely more heavily on statistics than the extensive - but arguably costly - peer review of the current RAE.

The REF will consist of a framework for the assessment and funding of academic research that takes into account the key differences between disciplines. Research income, research student data and a new bibliometric indicator of research quality will drive assessment and funding decisions for the science-based disciplines. A form of peer review will remain in place for the arts, humanities and social sciences.

The REF is expected to be phased in gradually. It will inform funding for science-based disciplines from 2010, with all other disciplines following from 2014.

### Research assessment elsewhere

The UK is not the only country with fresh plans for the allocation of research funding. Australia recently announced the final specifications of its first research evaluation method, the Research Quality Framework (RQF). While the RAE has a stronger emphasis on research environment and esteem indicators, the RQF grades both research quality and its impact. However, they also share common characteristics, namely similarities in the proportion of work to be examined, a minimum size of research grouping as well as rules for eligibility for inclusion in the volume count for funding. More details of the RQF can be found [here](#).