

Annex A

Consultation response form for the Research Excellence Framework

1. Respondents should complete the form below.
2. Responses should be e-mailed to refconsultation@hefce.ac.uk by **Thursday 14 February 2008**. HEIs in Northern Ireland should send a copy of their response to research.branch@delni.gov.uk
3. Institutions wishing to express an interest in taking part in the pilot of the bibliometrics indicator should e-mail their details to refconsultation@hefce.ac.uk by Thursday 31 January 2008.
4. We will publish an analysis of responses to the consultation. Additionally, all responses may be disclosed on request, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. The Act gives a public right of access to any information held by a public authority, in this case HEFCE. This includes information provided in response to a consultation. We have a responsibility to decide whether any responses, including information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential. We can refuse to disclose information only in exceptional circumstances. This means responses to this consultation are unlikely to be treated as confidential except in very particular circumstances. Further information about the Act is available at www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk.

Respondent's details

Are you responding: On behalf of an organisation
(Delete one)

Name of responding organisation/individual Campaign for Science & Engineering

Contact name Nick Dusic

Position within organisation (if applicable) Director

Contact telephone number 0207 679 4995

Contact e-mail address nick@sciencecampaign.org.uk

Consultation questions

(Boxes for responses can be expanded to the desired length.)

Consultation question 1a: Do you endorse our proposals for defining the broad group of science-based disciplines, and for dividing this into six main subject groups, in the context of our new approach to assessment and funding?

No. CaSE believes that all subjects should be assessed by light touch peer review.

CaSE works across the science and engineering based disciplines and will let subject disciplines respond to the proposed divisions, but is aware of quite a few problems. HEFCE needs to ensure that research spanning traditional boundaries is properly taken into account within the research assessment.

Consultation question 1b: Are there issues in relation to specific disciplines within this framework that we should consider?

Consultation question 2a: Do you agree that bibliometric indicators produced on the basis that we propose can provide a robust quality indicator in the context of our framework?

No. CaSE does not support HEFCE's proposal for a metrics driven assessment process. Rather metrics should be used to inform a peer review assessment.

CaSE does not believe that REF proposal meets the aims of the framework:

1) Robust indicator of research excellence

There is no evidence that the bibliometric indicator proposed can provide a robust quality indicator. Citations provide an indicator of impact on the research community, which may or may not correlate with research quality.

Some areas of science and engineering are not well served by the ISI and thus would not be served well by a bibliometric indicator. This is particularly true in engineering and other disciplines that produce a range of research outputs.

Although the proposed system would attempt to normalise indicators within particular sub-fields, there may be various reasons for increased citations (for example, it may just reflect a short lived popularity in a field rather than quality).

Bibliometric indicators are by their nature retrospective, so they will not provide as good of an indicator of current research quality. There will be a longer lag in assessing quality of research than in the current RAE.

2) Basis for distributing funding

There needs to be consultation about how any research assessment framework relates to funding (see question 8).

3) Reduce administrative burden

A bibliometric indicator is untested and could result in a huge administrative burden (see question 6)

4) Undesirable behavioural incentives

The research community will respond to incentives built into the assessment, so it is crucial that the new system encourages positive behaviour. HEFCE has not yet properly assessed all of the possible adverse consequence of the research community trying to maximise citations.

Even with trying to correct for sub-fields, a bibliometric indicator may lead to discounting of research in areas with lower citation rates, which could result in a strategic shift away from certain research solely in attempt to maximise an HEI's REF score.

Researchers may change or be asked to change their publishing behaviour in attempt to maximise the citations of their papers, this could include publishing fewer papers and only in higher impact journals. This would run counter to the goal of encouraging researchers to publish publicly funded research. It would also discount much applied research (see question 4).

One of the stated points of QR funding is to give institutions room to do 'blue skies' research which may not attract many citations if it is moving into a new field of study. The REF could make researchers and institutions more conservative in the research they do.

5) Promote equality and diversity

CaSE is very concerned about how a bibliometric indicator would affect employment decisions (see question 7).

6) Provide a stable framework for supporting the research base

CaSE is very concerned that there has been no consultation on how assessment will translate into funding allocations. The UK will not have a stable research base if funding allocations result in departmental closures (see question 8).

Way forward

CaSE strongly believes that a quality indicator should be decided by peer review, which should be informed in part by metrics. It should be up to expert panels to decide if they

want to consult a bibliometric indicator to help inform their peer review assessments (see question 8).

Consultation question 2b: Are there particular issues of significance needing to be resolved that we have not highlighted?

Individual subjects have distinct patterns of publications, which can include publishing in books, conference papers, theses, policy or industry reports. For some subjects it would not be appropriate to assess research by journal output only. There needs to be scope within the REF to make it feasible for subject panels to consult citation indexes of non-journal publications or to incorporate them within the assessment process through peer review.

Research income and PhD numbers are only a proxy indicator for research quality as they are input measures. More expensive research does not necessarily mean better quality research. The peer review process goes some way to ironing out the issue of research 'efficiency' by looking at both inputs and outputs.

Consultation question 3a: What are the key issues that we should consider in developing light touch peer review for the non science-based disciplines?

CaSE believes that all disciplines, including the science-based ones, should be assessed through light touch peer review.

Consultation question 3b: What are the main options for the form and conduct of this review?

Consultation question 4: Is there additional quantitative information that we should use in the assessment and funding framework to capture user value or the quality of applied research, or other key aspects of research excellence? Please be specific in terms of what the information is, what essential element of research it casts light on, how it may be found or collected, and where and how it might be used within the framework.

The REF needs to recognise quality research that produces outputs other than journal articles. Although this is recognised as an issue, especially for engineers and computer scientists, HEFCE has not come up with any concrete proposals for dealing with it. The Government wants HEIs to engage in applied research for industry and government departments.

CaSE believes that the REF should include an assessment of quality of applied research. However, we don't believe that there is a metric or suite of metrics could be used to effectively cover the range of applied outputs. Applied outputs should be assessed by peer review, which could include research users on its panel.

Peer review assessment is the only way in which the REF could include recognising researchers who give policy advice to Government. Many research reports to government or its agencies are not published in peer reviewed journals. Peer review panels could also take into consideration other activities, like public engagement, which are not served by metrics.

Consultation question 5: Are our proposals for the role of expert panels workable within the framework? Are there other key issues on which we might take their advice?

Expert panels need to develop a peer review process to assess disciplines using both quantitative and qualitative measures. It should be up to panels to determine what metrics are used and how much weight to give them within the assessment. Panels may need to create sub-panels to assist in peer reviewing outputs and other information. Panels need to be responsible for determining the final quality profile.

Consultation question 6: Are there significant implications for the burden on the sector of implementing our new framework that we have not identified? What more can we do to minimise the burden as we introduce the new arrangements?

If HEFCE does a pilot assessment of a bibliometric indicator, it needs to include an assessment of the administration burden of verifying and correcting mistakes in the data about research publications. It is quite possible that the process could negate the proposed savings in time and energy by developing a metrics based approach to assessment.

Consultation question 7: Do you consider that the proposals in this document are likely to have any negative impact on equal opportunities? What issues will we need to pay particular attention to?

A bibliometric indicator would adversely affect employment practices, because individuals will be valued according to their publishing record more than their future research potential. This would be devastating to early career or part-time researchers and those that have taken a career break. Mechanisms should be put in the REF to promote diversity within the science and engineering community. This could mean adjusting measures to account of early-career, part-time researchers, or those returning from a career break. These workers must not simply be excluded from assessment.

Consultation question 8: Do you have any other comments about our proposals, which are not covered by the above questions?

CaSE believes that HEFCE is rushing into the REF proposal without fully considering the implications for the science and engineering community. HEFCE must take the views of the scientific and engineering community into account when responding to the outcome of this consultation, in contrast to the previous consultation on the subject.

CaSE believes that peer review has to remain at the heart of the assessment process for science and engineering disciplines. Panels should be able to consult metrics, which for some disciplines may include a bibliometric indicator. Peer review must be more than determining the weighting of metrics. It should also include qualitative judgements. Such as:

- Assessing a range of research outputs determined by subject area
- Taking into account other factors, such as diversity issues, policy advice, outreach

The peer review panel should determine the final quality profile looking at both quantitative and qualitative measures.

There needs to be consultation about the purpose of QR funding (possibly as part of a wider review of HEI funding). It is critical for the community and assessors to understand how assessment results translate into funding allocations. It is not sensible to design a method of grading without specifying what consequences will be.

CaSE is concerned that not enough consideration is being given to the link between research and teaching in science and engineering subjects. Centralising research into fewer institutions has led to department closures in science and engineering and thus limited the number of places for people to study science and engineering. This goes against the Government's aim of widening participation and creating a highly skilled workforce.