

# **The UK Research Assessment Exercise: a report from your correspondent on the ground**

Ray Harris  
Emeritus Professor of Geography  
University College London

Warsaw  
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# Agenda

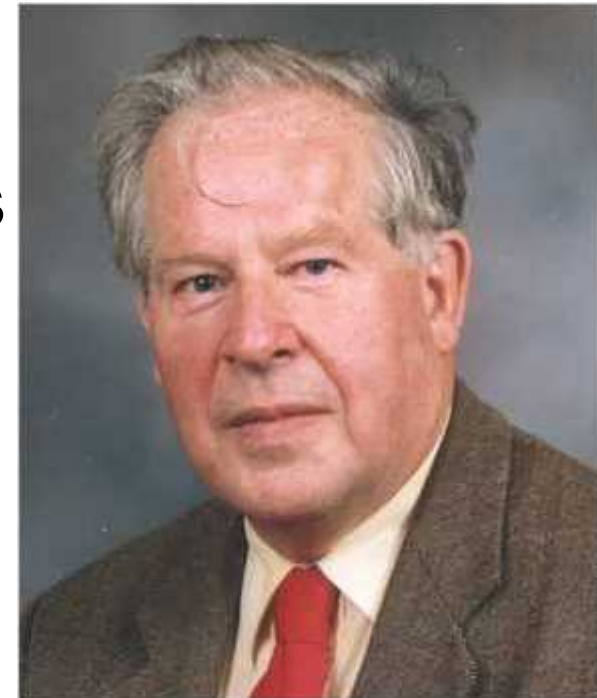
- Ray Harris
  - Lecturer University of Durham 1976 – 1987
  - Professor University College London 1995 – present
- Overview of the RAE
- Main features of each round
- Behaviour changes
- Conclusions
  
- The 2008 RAE cost £47 million [ca. 60 million euros] to review only English universities

## Key dates

- 1986 Research Selectivity Exercise
- 1989 Research Selectivity Exercise
- 1992 Research Assessment Exercise
- 1996 Research Assessment Exercise
- 2001 Research Assessment Exercise
- 2008 Research Assessment Exercise
- 2014 Research Excellence Framework

## Before 1986

- Research funding based on previous funding allocations
- Quinquennial Review (5 years)
- Old boys network
- Research done after teaching was over
- Sir Peter Swinnerton-Dyer
  - VC Cambridge
  - Head University Grants Committee



# 1986 Research Selectivity Exercise

- 37 cost centres = groups of subjects
- Each university submitted five outputs to each relevant cost centre and up to four pages of general description of research strength
- Results on a 4 point scale :  
outstanding to below average
- “We have to worry when they really allocate money to the results”

Professor Peter Haggett



# 1989 Research Selectivity Exercise

- 152 subject units
- 70 peer review panels
- Results on a five point scale : national and international levels of attainment
- Academics now becoming accustomed to reviews and terminology

## 1992 Research Assessment Exercise

- “Research active” staff submitted
- 72 units of assessment, 63 review panels
- Results reported in five grades 1,2,3,4,5
- No money for grades 1 and 2

# 1996 Research Assessment Exercise

- 69 units of assessment
- 60 panels
- Research work over 4 years except for humanities which was over 6 years
- Results reported in seven grades (1,2,3b, 3a,4,5,5\*)
- No money for grades 1 and 2



## 2001 Research Assessment Exercise

- 69 units of assessment
- 5 umbrella groups of panel chairs to try and achieve greater consistency
- Results reported in seven grades (1,2,3b, 3a,4,5,5\*)
- Departments rated in the top two categories contained nearly 40 per cent of academics compared with only 13 per cent in 1992
- No money for grades 1, 2 and 3; less money for grade 4

## 2003 Roberts Review

- Extensive consultation
- Academics : we do not like it but keep the RAE
- Expert review essential
- Research profiles for departments not single grades
- Comparability across disciplines



Sir Gareth Roberts

## 2006 Metrics Proposal

- Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown announced RAE peer review to be replaced by metrics – research income, citations, postgraduate numbers, etc
- Dropped after pressure from academics

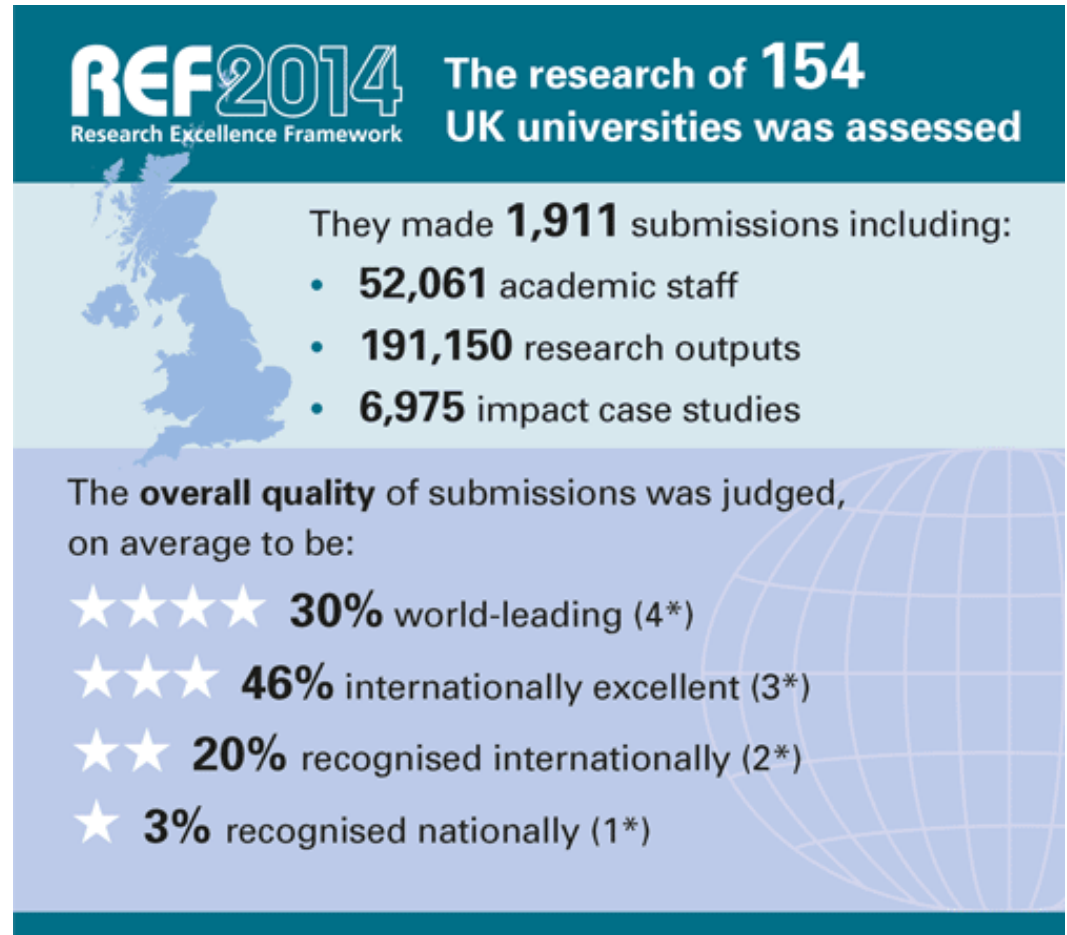


## 2008 Research Assessment Exercise

- 67 panels overseen by 15 umbrella panels
- Explicit criteria
- Grades as 2001, ie 1,2,3b,3a,4,5,5\*
- Only money for 5 and 5\*
- Cost of the 2008 RAE was £47 million

# 2014 Research Excellence Framework

- 36 panels and 4 umbrella panels
- Outputs : 65%
- Impact : 20%
- Environment : 15%
- Some metrics, eg citations
- Only money for grades 3 and 4 (ratio 1:4)



Rank 2014	Rank 2008	Institution	GPA
1	1	Institute of Cancer Research	3.40
2	6	Imperial College London	3.36
3	=4	London School of Economics	3.35
4	=4	University of Oxford	3.34
5	2	University of Cambridge	3.33
6	=22	Cardiff University	3.27
7	=22	King's College London	3.23
=8	7	University College London	3.22
=8	9	University of Warwick	3.22
10	3	London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	3.20

Original data from Hefce; GPA calculation by *Times Higher Education*



REF2014  
UCL  
NO. 1  
for research strength

## Behaviour changes

- Focus on research
- Comparative neglect of teaching
- Selective research output (best four items) becomes a target for total output
- Staff poaching
- Gaming
- Active management by universities – staff, departments, faculties

# Conclusions

- Expensive
  - Approximately 1000 euros per academic staff member per assessment
- Academics want to keep the RAE/REF because metrics are worse. Metrics are cheap but do not capture subtlety.
- Transparent; stated criteria; **but**
- Always changing
- Increasingly political because UK governments want to interfere : as student numbers increase so does political interference in universities