



re: search

Moving forward

These are exciting times to be involved in research at Bristol University. There has been an internal review of most University departments, and new resources for investment have been identified. So for this research-intensive University, with its declared ambition to be a world player and to focus on research-led education, success in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) is a key expectation.

The next RAE, to be held in 2007-08, will assess and rank the quality of research in all disciplines in all UK universities. The outcome will inform the higher education funding bodies as to how public funds for research should be distributed. Uniquely, the RAE assesses the research we have done, rather than that we are promising to do. It uses very similar criteria to those used in this University to evaluate promotion, and it facilitates the accumulation of good academics into groups of reasonable critical mass. It requires strategic discussions of our research, of a kind that rarely happened before the RAE era, and in many cases our research is the better for that – not least when it has sharpened the case for investment in research. More than that, the RAE offers opportunities both to measure ourselves against our peers and to test and sustain our own strategic research plans.

While the present RAE may be unnecessarily cumbersome and bureaucratic, and it is certainly very time-consuming, any assessment would involve discussions of research strategy similar to those we are having now, and a similar anticipation of how well our different units will do next time round, relative to our competitors. League tables do matter to departments, as those near the top benefit greatly from the quality of the staff and students, and the volumes of funding that they then attract. It therefore remains a matter of the highest priority to have as many departments as possible near the top of their respective league tables. The current investment thus provides a timely stimulus to our thinking for the future.

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