

Institute of Physics, November 11th, 2008

## 'Funding University Biosciences in the Post RAE-Era'

**Professor Adrian Smith** (Director General, Science and Research, DIUS) ['Setting the scene: The research councils, funding plans for Biosciences over the next years, RAE and the REF'](#)

### Keypoints:

- There is a general perception in government that the UK punches above its weight in its research base.
- In a difficult economic climate it is important that there is quantitative evidence to support the request for funding.
- The future depends on increasing STEM skills at all levels
- There is a clear sense in government that we do not have enough people in STEM.
- Difficulty can arise because teaching is controlled by the DCSF - problems in the pipeline can not be levered.
- The good figures in biology that HESA suggest are skewed by the inclusion of sports science and psychology graduates.
- The DIUS is currently undertaking work to analyse the demand for STEM graduates in the economy. It is important that funding can be defended to the treasury and to demonstrate the broad base of careers that STEM graduates enter.
- Do we stimulate children to pursue 'hardcore' science?
- The current economic climate means that the lead in period to the next fiscal review will not be good - it is important to demonstrate the value of the work carried out, to raise the banner for the pursuit of knowledge but also concrete manifestations.
- The last period of funding was a 'golden age' - it will be a triumph to hold onto current spending.
- We are no longer a manufacturing society etc. We could become a 'smart society'.
- Improve public policy and public impact.
- There is no ministerial interest in moving away from dual support system. However, the landscape for university funding is very complicated.
- It is important to understand the behavioural implications of the new system - RAE had distorted behaviours.

**David Sweeney** (Director, Research Innovation and Skills, HEFCE) ['The HEFCE perspective on RAE and REF, and the future of the quality-related element of HEFCE funding for research'](#)

### Keypoints:

- It is impossible to anticipate how behaviour may be changed by the change in funding.
- QR is characterised badly in the press - funding is granted in blocks so that institutions can make the judgments in regards to allocation.
- It is important to promote the interdisciplinary nature of the work.
- REF aims to build upon the lessons learnt by RAE - REF is still a work in progress. However, the focus should be excellence.
- Questions have been asked as to whether the biometric data is robust enough.
- The framework should be based on excellence, significance, originality and rigour. Repackaging old material is not good enough - significant impact should not be rewarded without originality.
- There will be a consultation process - it is important that a dialogue is developed. The system must carry the confidence of the sector and the government.

- The evaluations will have a substantial peer review component.

**Professor Douglas Kell** (Chief Executive, BBSRC) ['A research council perspective'](#)

**Keypoints:**

- Excellence with impact should be rewarded
- There needs to be support for industry and public engagement.
- A funding cycle exists - it is necessary to be engaged with DIUS to work on the spending review.
- The BBSRC have 10, 5 and 3 year plans.
- There are a number of challenges - environmental change, science of life and tools & technologies.
- The development of 'good' science has to be communicated to the public - it is important that everybody understands, not just those who fund it.
- There is a need for data management and multi-disciplinary approaches.
- It is important to rid the system of unneeded administration.
- Important to make sure the system is not based on an out-dated notion of universities - there are higher participation rates, emphasis on interdisciplinary etc.

Need to optimise the relationship between research and teaching.

**Nicola Perrin** (Senior Policy Advisor, Wellcome Trust) ['A charity perspective'](#)

**Keypoints:**

- 15% of research is funded by charities and the bulk of this is in the life/medical sciences.
- They are pleased that there is support for the dual support system as this means that universities can plan strategically.
- The priorities for the Wellcome Trust include genetics, neuroscience & mental health, emerging infectious diseases, health innovation and the UK Centre for Medical Research and Innovation (due to open in 2013)
- In partnership with the government the WT operates the Charity Research Fund - there needs to an improvement in the understanding of the fund and what the demands on the fund are.
- REF should recognise excellence - also other issues to consider including publication, career development and long term sustainability.

**Nigel Brown** ['Costing the Biosciences'](#): A report from **Nigel Brown Associates** on the HUBS funded exercise to assess the true cost of teaching biosciences in UK Higher Education. ***The full report will be published early in 2009.***

## Notes: Questions from the Floor

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### **Topic: Metricise esteem indicators?**

DS: If we can - would like to metricise where it would carry the confidence of the sector

### **Topic: Will reviews have equal weight to original articles?**

DS: No - the fact they will be cited more will be discounted.

### **Topic: teaching led research?**

DS: Is not the upper most in the Departments thinking.

### **Topic: responsive mode funding?**

DK: There are a range of opinions about maintaining funding in responsive mode - the committee structures will promote it.

AS: Fundamental problems tend to be rooted in the multidisciplinary.

DS: Excellence where it can be found - even outside the main institutions.

### **Topic: Publication - discouraged to publish all work.**

DS: Pilot should test this issue - However, it is important that work is available but is it necessary for all work to be published in a formal journal. There maybe other avenues to publish work.

Declan: There are differences in the fields - differences in publishing behaviour and excellence

DK: Difference between data and papers.

### **Topic: Costing?**

NP: It is important that all grants are costed in the same way - full costs can not be funded.

DS: Hopefully RAE will recognise all excellence.

### **Topic: R&T - conflicts with picture of needing to enthuse people.**

DK: An optimum exists in between research and teaching - the traditional model will need to change. People need to be more integrated at a postgraduate level.

AS: This should be an internal matter at universities - people do not like to be micromanaged.

DS: It is important that universities are not made into research institutions - not all work will have impact. The institution should build up a portfolio of work.

**Topic: Capability funding**

DS: Discussions have not yet taken place in regards to a capability funding stream.

AS: Questions will not go away - it is a retrospective fit. The system needs to be able to respond. It is difficult for universities to have a radical review of mission.

**Topic: Reward research intensity**

DS: this will be a feature of discussions.

**Topic: A-Levels**

AS: there is a serious strategic crisis in government - the pipeline is broken and the problem as to be. Industry is interested in the quality of students. The impact of subject choices needs to be explained to students.