

Research assessment and publication behaviour

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Overview



- Research assessment – why do it?
- Current research assessment in the UK (RAE)
- Proposed changes to this process (REF)
- Researchers: where and what they publish
- The impact of research assessment on the researchers' publication behaviour
- Citations
- Research timescales
- Publication and the REF
- Some conclusions

Research Assessment



- Accountability to funders for their investment demonstrating that public investment in research is effective and delivers public benefit
- Governments see universities as drivers of economic performance
- Many western (and other) economies increasingly dependent on knowledge and knowledge based skills rather than production of goods

UK Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS)



The value of research - Economic impact

- Delivers highly skilled people to the labour market
- Improving the performance of existing businesses
- Creating new businesses
- Attracting research and development investment from global businesses
- Improving public policy and public services

Research assessment and funding in the UK



- Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)
- Has run for 23 years
- Successive RAEs over the last 20 have concentrated research funding years in the universities with the highest quality and concentration of research
- UK research performance has improved dramatically over this period
- This 'ramping/ of funds been recognised as an important factor in the high showing of UK universities in a range of league tables

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)

The purpose of the REF



- To secure the continuation of a world class dynamic and responsive research base in the UK
- Funding: selective funding allocations informed by quality assessment
- Accountability – demonstrating that public investment in research is effective and delivers public benefit
- Framework:
 - Outputs, quality of all types of research 60%,
 - Impact, economic, social, cultural benefits 25%,
 - Environment, quality and sustainability of the research environment 15%

UK Government/BIS view of the REF



- The primary focus of the REF will be to identify excellent research of all kinds
- Government has indicated that HEFCE also should take account of the following priorities:
 - take better account of the impact research makes on the economy and society
 - continue to incentivise research excellence
 - reflect the quality of researchers' contribution to public policy making and to public engagement, and
 - not create disincentives to researchers moving between academia and the private sector

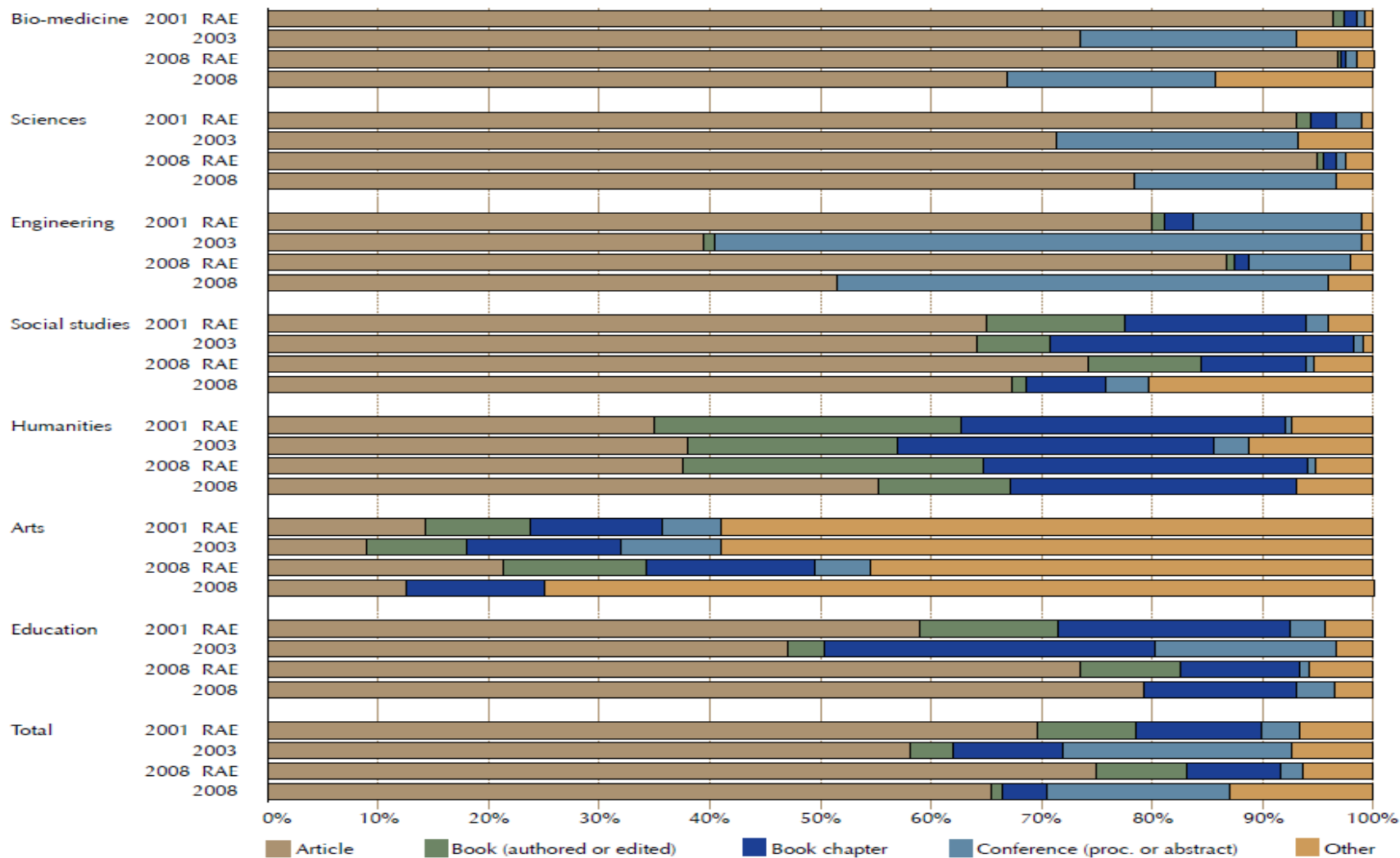
Researchers and the RAE: where and what they publish



- For the clear majority of researchers, the requirements of the RAE are their major concern
- Widespread perception that RAE and related policies of their institutions put pressure on them to publish journal articles and to publish in journals with a high impact factor
- Many view the RAE as a game they are forced to play

One may not like the game, but we are on the playing field. (Economics)

What is published and what is submitted to the RAE



Researchers' understanding of the rules



Do you believe that the 2008 RAE submission rules exclude any research outputs?

<i>Yes, very much</i>	<i>8%</i>
<i>Yes, some</i>	<i>17%</i>
<i>No</i>	<i>43%</i>
<i>Don't know</i>	<i>32%</i>

Institutional 'game playing'



- Many researchers are uncomfortable with the implications of such strategies feeling they may constrain their autonomy
- Institutional policies may prioritise publication in journals with high impact factors –although RAE guidelines do not in fact demand this

Head of Research in my institute actively discourages book chapters and reviews because they were not prestigious in the RAE (Physics)

Assessment and citation behaviour



- Journal articles are the most cited format
- Citation patterns influenced both by discipline and by policies of some journals

Many journals limit the amount of space for reference lists And its often necessary to remove highly relevant and important references. (Medical and biological sciences)

Citation practice



- Researchers cite to establish knowledge of context and provide supporting evidence
- Citations may be selected on authority of the work, the author and of the journal
- Disagreement with the findings often a reason for citation
- Advice from journal editors and reviewers
- Tailoring to suit requirements of specific journals that may limit numbers of citations
- Ready access to material online has facilitated decisions on what to cite

Tailoring citations



- Need for guidance on tailoring citations to meet journal requirements (real or perceived)
- Tailoring citations to increase chances of publication

Inevitably authors try and guess who may act as referee and then cite their work extensively. I do! (Interdisciplinary)

- Reports of pressure from US journals to cite US research
- Gaming: manipulating citation counts through highly controversial articles or citation circles

Citations and access to reading



- 24% of respondents said that accessibility had a high level of influence on their citation practices

I am most likely to cite papers that are online and easy to find. (Medicine and biological sciences)

- Concerns that the predominance of the most accessible may have damaging consequences

Our practices have changed from pulling piles of things off shelves to sitting at your desk looking at what's there. It's probably made our research poorer in many ways. (Psychology)

Research timescales



- The RAE is usually based on periods of assessment of seven years
- Timescales for research often long and unpredictable
- Timescales for impacts to be felt and acknowledged even longer
- Humanities – monographs can take years to produce and longer for any impact to be measured
- This may mean that work underway cannot be assessed or that researchers are encouraged to publish before they are ready to do so

Anticipating the REF



- Final details not yet announced
- Bibliometrics are likely to play a large part (even though less than originally proposed)
- A system based even in part on citations will have a significant effect on the publication behaviour
 - 22% will produce more publications
 - 33% will submit more often to high impact journals
 - 43% will make their research freely available on open access
- 38% will cite collaborators work more often
- 22% concerned it will lead to unprofessional and unproductive game playing

Some tentative conclusions



- Institutions need to address the confusion caused by mixed messages about choice of publication and research assessment
- Citation – an issue which will grow in importance within assessment, especially with bibliometrics
- Those involved in assessment need to be aware of the different author listing conventions and their meanings
- Research assessment needs to take account of the variability of lifecycles of information across the disciplines and the formats chosen for publication

RIN References



- Communicating Knowledge: How and why UK researchers publish and disseminate their findings
www.rin.ac.uk/communicating-knowledge
- Scholarly books and journals at risk: Responding to the challenges of a changing economy
www.rin.ac.uk/files/Scholarly_books_journals_at_risk.pdf
- E-journals: their use, value and impact
www.rin.ac.uk/use-ejournals
- Mind the skills gap
www.rin.ac.uk/training-research-info
- Ensuring a bright future for research libraries. A guide for vice-chancellors and senior institutional managers
www.rin.ac.uk/bright-futures-libraries

All the RIN reports and briefings are downloadable from our website
If you would like to be added to the RIN mailing list
please contact me: sally.curry@rin.ac.uk

References



- RIN also has a web page devoted to 'Transitions in scholarly communication' focusing on changes taking place in the world of scholarly communications and their impact on research
<http://www.rin.ac.uk/resources/publishing/transitions-scholarly-communications>
- The Future of University Research, Professor Adrian Smith
Director General of Science and Research, Higher Education Policy Institute Conference, 14th October 2009
- Michael Arthur, VC University of Leeds, Chair of the Russell Group, Research Funding and Assessment: The Future.
Assessment selectivity and excellence: Getting the balance right. Higher Education Policy Institute Conference, 14th October 2009