The structure of the UK Research Assessment Exercise in 2008

The sixth national Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) is to be completed by 2008. This exercise will facilitate the four higher education (HE) funding bodies (Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), and Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland (DELNI)) in distributing public funds, based on a rigorous assessment process that is both transparent and robust.

This is an extremely important assessment of research that will determine the level of funding for HE institutions. Although the exercise is called RAE 2008, only outputs (publications, etc.) published between 1 January 2001 and 31 July 2007 will be included. There will be 15 main panels and 67 sub-panels. Nursing and midwifery are together in unit of assessment 11 in main panel 'c' along with dentistry, nursing, allied health professions/studies and pharmacy.

The main difference between RAE 2008 and RAE 2001 is the introduction of quality profiles, as well as a two-tier panel structure, both of which have been introduced to enhance the robustness of the exercise. Each sub-panel will have a chair, expert panel members (not normally exceeding 15), and one or two observers (not yet decided). The sub-panel chairs will be appointed by the four HE funding bodies' chief executives, who will review the nominations along with the main panel chairs, the RAE team and the RAE steering group. Sub-panel members will mainly be 'practising researchers of suitable personal standing and expertise'. It is desirable that at least a third of the members of each sub-panel should have previous RAE panel experience. The four HE funding bodies have stated that the membership of sub-panels will 'reflect the diversity of the research community, in terms of age, gender, ethnic origin, scope and focus of their home institution, and geographical location' and panel members will be individuals 'with a significant personal record in research at the highest level' (see: www.rae.ac.uk/pubs/2004/03/rae0403.doc). Panel membership is important, as the criteria for assessment for each unit will be decided by the sub-panel and approved by the main panel along with one or two international assessors (where appropriate). Up to four research outputs may be submitted (not yet decided for each panel). Eligible outputs and other details of data to be collected will be outlined in the *Guidance of Submissions* due to be published in June 2005.

The outcomes of RAE 2008 will impact on the quality, type and future funding of research and approximately £9 billion (over six years) will be allocated by the four HE funding bodies to institutions that are conducting top quality research.

One thing we can be certain about is the importance of peer-reviewed publications. *Evidence Based Midwifery* is preparing a special edition of the journal for the International Congress of Midwives in Brisbane 2005. We are looking for research papers of around 3000 words with an international focus.

Reference

Higher Education Funding Council for England, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland. (2004) *Research Assessment Exercise 2008*. See: www.rae.ac.uk/Pubs/2004/03/ (accessed 4 and 11 November 2004).

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