

The effect of the research assessment exercise on organisational culture in English universities: collegiality versus managerialism

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Abstract The purpose of the study is to identify the effect of the research assessment exercise (RAE) on the balance between collegiality and managerialism in English universities. The article examines the institutional strategies for the 2001 RAE and its effect on organisational culture, identifying change in governance, management and leadership in English universities. The study is based upon case studies of four selected English universities.

Keywords Assessment · England · Governance · Leadership · Management · Quality · RAE

Introduction

The research assessment exercise (RAE) in England, which is linked to the HEFCE's (Higher Education Funding Council for England) funding allocation, has some implications for institutional organisational culture [see McNay (1997, 2003), for the mechanism of the RAE in the UK]. The principal purpose of the RAE is to allocate research funds to institutions fairly rather than building up quality cultures and an institutional quality enhancement mechanism, although the HEFCE, according to its Director, started to pay attention to quality enhancement around 1996 as well as to use the result of the RAE to assess the strength of the disciplines (interview on 21 June, 2005). Such a main purpose of the RAE has reflected the focus of institutional strategies—an attempt to attract excellent researchers, and keep internationally recognised scholars by promotion, rather than making an effort to internalise the quality enhancement system.

Website: Higher Education and Research Opportunities in the United Kingdom <http://www.hero.ac.uk/rae/>

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The purpose of the study is to identify the effect of the RAE on the organisational culture of English universities. The paper examines the effect of the RAE on institutional governance, management, and leadership, paying attention to the balance of collegiality and managerialism. It focuses upon institutional strategies for the 2001 RAE, analysing them between 1996 and 2001. The study addresses the following research question: how did the 2001 RAE affect the balance between collegiality and managerialism in an institution in England? The study is significant because it builds upon existing studies such as Miller's *The Management of Change in Universities* (1995) by paying attention to the diversity of the university sector [for studies on the RAE, see Tapper and Salter (2003, 2004) and in the context of academic profession, Henkel (1999)]. The study is a theoretically informed empirical study.

Theoretical framework

It can be hypothesised that the RAE can affect the balance between collegiality and managerialism in an institution and a unit. It can be assumed that the pattern of the RAE's influence on the balance differs between institutions and units, which is largely affected by the VC's leadership, the established institutional and departmental culture, and the institutional mission and history.

Collegiality is, according to Deem, based upon 'minimal hierarchy and maximum trust' on the basis of professional autonomy (1998, p. 48). Bargh, Scott, and Smith (1996), taking a similar position to Deem's, emphasise the aspect of discipline and peers in the concept of collegiality, using the terms 'professional value' or 'universities as communities of scholars'. 'Professional value', according to Bargh et al., focuses on disciplines and peers, while 'managerial value' emphasises institutional imperatives and bureaucratic formal hierarchical positions. Tapper and Palfreyman (1998) regard self-governing bodies of scholars as characteristic of collegiality. Trow (1994) emphasising the value of academic communities identifies the traditional type of management embedded in academics, 'soft managerialism' (in his original term), in that the academic community itself determines the norms and traditions for managerial effectiveness which aims at high quality provision at the lowest cost. Kogan, paying attention to governance, defines collegium as "a group of academics of equal decision-making power acting together to determine standards of entry and accreditation, to share collective resources, and to determine divisions of labour and reward systems" (1999, p. 264).

Accordingly, it can be understood that 'collegiality' is based upon academic value and trust between academics (see Table 1). The power locus of collegiality is often in the Department, and to some degree, the Senate as the collective body of individual academics which has equal decision-making power. The typical example of collegiality is seen in Oxbridge in the UK context.

In relation to the RAEs, the traits of management based upon collegiality include the following: Departments prepare the RAE submission rather than the institution as a whole, which consist of administrative work relating to publication, external funding issues, etc. rather than strategic, target-oriented management; the lack of the institutional strategies in terms of the RAE; the substantial power of the Heads of Departments against the Deans of Faculties and the VC; and the distribution of

Table 1 Characteristics of collegiality, managerialism, and bureaucracy

| | Collegiality | Managerialism | Bureaucratism |
|----------------|--|--|--|
| Locus of power | Department | (Pro-)VC or central Research Committee (or an equivalent body) | Central or local administration |
| Value | Academic community's value | External stakeholders' value | External stakeholders' value |
| Management | Trust Informality Minimal hierarchy | Lack of trust Strategy Formality Hierarchy | Lack of trust Prescription Formality Hierarchy |

research funds in accordance with the HEFCE formula as the result of the RAE, rather than reallocating it in accordance with institutional strategies.

Regarding managerialism, the Jarrett Report (CVCP, 1985) supported the idea relating to managerialism. It recommended the role of vice-chancellors as chief executives and top-down management. The discourses in the Jarrett Report included efficiency, cost-effectiveness, performance indicators, and accountability. The prominent logic was that the public financial crisis can be resolved by improving efficiency and cost-effectiveness in an institution, centralising in terms of strategic planning and management, and introducing performance indicators. The absent concepts and discourses in the Report included 'collegiality' and the power of faculties and students.

It can be assumed that the logic seen in the Jarrett Report is still valid for governments, political parties, the HEFCE, and VCs, while academics tend to take antagonistic positions against managerial perspectives, supporting collegiality. 'Managerialism' is, for many academics, hierarchical and bureaucratic on the basis of an absence of trust in relation to government, as Bargh et al. (1996) as well as Deem (1998) also argue. Bargh et al. postulate that managerial culture is "embedded in the governing body and the senior management group which imposes centrally driven imperatives, in particular economic objectives (e.g. efficiency and value for money) on differentiated academic units". Trow (1994) argues that management in UK universities changed from 'soft managerialism' to 'hard managerialism' as a result of a withdrawal of trust between government and the universities and the introduction of the criteria of performance and rules of accountability by government. The locus of power in hard managerialism is, according to Trow, outside the academic community; it resides in governments and the business sector which attempt to introduce management systems for accountability, quality, and efficiency by imposing funding and accountability mechanisms. It can be assumed that Trow's term of 'hard management' is equivalent or close to the idea of 'managerialism' in this study.

The study accepts the line of definition drawn by Trow, Deem, and Bargh et al.. It concomitantly pays attention to the logic of the proponents of managerialism (e.g. the Jarrett Report) because of an assumption that such logic shapes or at least affects organisational culture in the post-Jarrett period. Managerialism in this sense differs from one which refers to organisational forms, management practices, and values seen in private business, and an attempt to adopt such forms in the private sector into the public sector. Rather, managerialism in this study can be understood as

executive management. It is the practice of neo-liberalism, seeking efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and accountability, and emphasising executive management.

The characteristics of managerialism, as Table 1 shows, include ‘hierarchical’, ‘formal’ and ‘the lack of trust’. In addition, the ‘strategic’ element is significant in the trait of managerialism because the rationale behind the introduction of managerialism is financial restriction, and therefore selective funding allocation and cost-effective management for its resolution. The locus of the power of ‘managerialism’ is the university’s Centre, in particular, the Vice-Chancellor, and in the case of RAE, the VC, Pro- or Deputy VC for research or the members of the Research Committee.

‘Managerialism’ in the context of the RAE can be captured in the following traits: central strategic management and monitoring of the Departments’ performance, in order to gain better ratings in RAE (e.g. benchmarking, appointment and promotion); (Pro) Vice-Chancellors’ leadership; the significant role and function of the University’s Research Committee; the power of the Deans of Faculties; the reflection of external stakeholders’ value on university management on research; top-down policy formulation relating to the issue of RAE in an institution; and the redistribution of research funds at the University in accordance with the institutional strategic policy and the search for cost-effectiveness.

Finally, bureaucratic management in the study, like managerialism, refers to hierarchical and lack of trust, reflecting external stakeholders’ value. However, the locus of bureaucratic management is central or local administration, rather than VCs and Research Committees. In addition, the type of management is prescriptive, and sometimes rigid and less flexible. The study refers to such management as ‘bureaucratism’ [see Miller (1995) for a description of the bureaucratic and the rational model]. ‘Bureaucratism’ was seen in former polytechnics, which were controlled by the LEA (Local Education Authority) before 1988 and evaluated by HMI (Her Majesty Inspectorate) and the CNAA (Council for National Academic Awards).

The RAE could change the balance between collegiality and managerialism. It does not, however, necessarily provide a single impetus in terms of this balance, this may change according to institutions and units and even by each RAE. There are four possible, overall patterns of the effect of RAE on the balance between collegiality and managerialism. The first pattern—the continuity of collegiality—tends to be seen in elite institutions, in which Departments have great autonomy against the University Centre. Research culture in such institutions is based upon collegiality. There could be the University’s monitoring of the Department, but only of weak Departments, which show a problematic performance in the RAE. The second pattern is the shift from collegiality to managerialism, by strengthening the VC’s and/or the University’s Research Committee’s (or an equivalent body) monitoring of the Departments. The patterns of central involvement such as the appointment and promotion of staff, and the monitoring of publication issues and research activities differ between institutions and during different time periods. The third pattern—the shift from collegiality to the hybrid of collegiality and managerialism—could also take different forms, influenced by the VC’s leadership, the institutional mission and history. The fourth pattern is the case of the post-1992 university, which did not possess the collegial culture before 1992 which has been seen in pre-1992 universities, but was based upon bureaucratic management controlled by the LEA until 1988. There was discontinuity of such bureaucratic management in 1988.

Managerialism in the context of RAE has been seen to some degree in some post-1992 universities, after the first RAE experience in 1992.

Methods

The study employed in-depth case studies of four institutions. The study keeps the name of the institutions anonymous because it deals with sensitive issues—institutional strategies. The principle of the selection of the institutions relied upon successful performance in the 2001 RAE, having the number of departments rated at international and/or national excellence levels. The study selected sociology from arts and social science and physics from science and engineering as disciplinary areas (units) in these four institutions. The reason for the selection was based upon the fact that these disciplines commonly showed progress or the same scores in research performance in selected institutions between the 1996 and 2001 RAEs. The disciplinary areas of three institutions corresponded to the units—the Departments, while the other institutions did not have a Department of Physics, but a Physicist Group.

The study employs the following methods for data collection because they allow data to be collected efficiently: (1) documentation at system and institutional levels; and (2) semi-structured interviews at institutional and unit levels.

Documentation

The study collected the HEFCE's and institutional publications and on-line documents in order to elucidate the characteristics of the four selected institutions and their units, the relationship between the university centre and units in an institution, and institutional RAE strategies and management. The HEFCE's publications collected for the study included *Research Assessment Exercise: The Outcome*, *Research Assessment Exercise 2001: Assessment Panels' Criteria and Working Methods*, and *Recurrent Grants* (see also HEFCE, 1998, 1999a, b, d, 2000; Roberts, 2003). Documentation from individual institutions included the following: institutional mission, history, and characteristics; university strategic plans; benchmarking reports; annual report; statement of accounts or operating statement and financial forecasts; size of units; the institutional management and administrative organisation and reporting structure; the institutional committee structure; the role of the research committee; and 2001 RAE submissions. The collected documents were carefully evaluated so as to attest their worth for the purposes of this study.

Semi-structured interviews

The sampling of participants for the interviews included: the Director of Research and Knowledge Transfer in the HEFCE; Vice-Chancellors, Deputy-Vice-Chancellor or Pro-Vice-Chancellor; a chair of a Research Committee; and the Heads of Sociology and Physics Departments or Groups. This choice was guided by the need to establish data relating to the research question and the timeframe of this study. The purpose of interviews was to identify the following elements in relation to RAEs: institutional and departmental strategies for the 2001 RAE; institutional management, financial

allocation, administrative organisation, committee structure, and the size of units; the relationship between the university centre and the units; the relationship between a governing body and the research committee, and the research committee and the units; the roles and functions of Deans of Faculties and the Heads of Departments; the relationship between the Deans of Faculties, the Head of Departments, and individual staff; the timing of the introduction of benchmarking and its effectiveness; the balance between collegiality and managerialism; and the characteristics of quality culture. The interviews also focused upon the change in the above elements between 1996 and 2001 and its rationale.

Results

The 2001 RAE brought about a more competitive research environment than it had in previous RAEs (interview with the Director of the HEFCE on 21 June, 2005). The main features of the outcome of the 2001 RAE in comparison with previous RAEs are as follows:

- The number of departments rated as of national or international excellence increased from 43 percent to 64 percent.
- The boundaries between pre-1992 universities and post-1992 universities in terms of research were much more blurred than those in 1996.
- There were fewer departments and researchers being submitted for assessment, suggesting that universities are less willing to put forward research which they feel might not receive a high enough rating to earn funding. (BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/education/rae/2001/analysis.stm>)

The implication of such traits of the 2001 RAE includes increasing institutional or departmental strategic management for research, aiming at better ratings.

The main findings of the change in individual universities' organisational culture in relation to 2001 RAE are as follows.

University A

University A is one of oldest universities. University A's management is traditionally based upon strong collegiality, in which the Departments have sovereign power against the University's centre. Governments' neo-liberal policy since 1979 have challenged donnish domination (Halsey, 1992) and resulted in the increase of the University centre's power; however, there has still been the continuity of traditional culture (Tapper & Salter, 1992).

There was not enough evidence that the RAEs have eroded such a traditional mode of collegiality; on the contrary, the interviewees in this study suggested that the research culture conditioning University A's strong performance in the RAEs is based upon collegiality. A couple of interviewees at University A confirmed that the University is not managerial in terms of the power relationship between the VC and the Departments and the roles and function of the VC; it operates on the collegial basis, stressing the substantial power of the Departments against the VC. One interviewee, an administrative officer in the United Administrative Service, endorsed such a general argument in the context of the 2001 RAE:

“The University did not have a particular strategy in order to achieve satisfactory result in the 2001 RAE. We [VC, Pro-VCs, and Registry (the principal administrative officer of the University)] have the highest expectations in terms of the quality of work undertaken by our staff and our faith in them was justified by the results where, on every scoring mechanism, we were judged to have been the most successful university in the 2001 RAE”.

Another interviewee, a member of the senior academic staff, described the Department’s responsibility for the 2001 RAE:

“Departments were expected to prepare their own submissions and to assume ultimate responsibility for them. To do this, they identified academic leaders (normally the Heads of Departments) to guide the initial compilation of their individual submissions”.

He added that the Heads of the Departments at University A were not managerial, but bottom-up, collegial-based.

However, the continuity of donnish domination did not mean there was no central management for the 2001 RAE in University A, as the following three pieces of evidence indicate. The first evidence is the reshuffling of administrative officers at the United Administrative Service, followed by the unsatisfactory outcome of the 1996 RAE. One interviewee implied that the Departments’ policy on the selection of as many research actives as possible and the Registry’s support for it caused an unexpected outcome. The second evidence is that the VC undertook a full review of the two Departments which performed badly for the 2001 RAE, in the light of their RAE performance overall and the professional nature of the courses. The review led to a revision of staffing structure in these Departments, and in terms of one of the two Departments, continuous monitoring. The third evidence is that the VC and Pro-Vice-Chancellors could steer staff appointments to some degree through the management of the Early Retirement Scheme and the ‘proleptic appointments’ (Appointment made in anticipation of a post becoming vacant through termination of employment), as the interviews suggest.

University B

University B is a civic university. University B’s preparation for the 2001 RAE suggests that the institution’s management style was, to a significant degree, based upon collegiality before 2001, although it has started to move towards a more managerial culture since 2001. The overall 2001 RAE performance of the University was not as good as previous RAEs between 1986 and 1996. However, the units of physics and sociology showed better performance in the 2001 RAE than in previous ones. The Department of Physics successfully included more selected staff, maintaining the same rating as in 1996. The Department of Sociology improved its rating.

The University did not change the methodology of the internal funding allocation, and the form of management during 1996 and 2001. The VC’s RAE strategies during the period were rather partial only by reviewing and monitoring two Departments which showed problematic performance in the 1996 RAE—as well as reorganising not a whole institution, but graduate schools. The VC restructured those Departments by creating new positions of Research Deans and empowering the Heads of Research Divisions. The purpose of structure reform in the Departments

was—according to an interviewee, the then Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research—to create a research culture, changing their problem-based approach and teaching-oriented climate.

The limitation of the function of the central Research Committee, the local operation of the submission for the 2001 RAE by the Research Support Office, and the Department's own decisions on the closure of the Department—which showed problematic performance in the 1996 RAE and had a joint submission with another Department for 2001—rather than the VC's decision, suggest the deficiency of central management in University B in the 2001 RAE. Similarly, from the Departments' points of view, the Heads of Schools in the interviews confirmed that there was not a clear University's RAE strategy as such during 1996 and 2001, except for the appointment of academic staff with a good publication record—which has been the University's policy throughout the RAE period (from 1986 to now). One interviewee stressed “it was generally concerned that the preparation of the RAE was research groups' and individuals' responsibility” in University B during the period.

The Departments of Physics and Sociology applied the policy of the inclusion of as many research active staff as possible for the 2001 RAE. These policies were successful concerning the outcome. The interviewee from the Sociology Disciplinary Group stated that the policy was useful for the 2001 RAE because the Sociology Panel in the HEFCE examined the quantitative aspect—which was only four publications—rather than the qualitative aspect, such as the kinds of journals for the 2001 RAE (Interview on 24 June, 2005). She pointed out that the Disciplinary Group would need a different strategy for the 2008 RAE because of the qualitative emphasis of the Panel.

It is worthwhile noting that such locally based management for the RAE started to change substantially after 2001 towards being more managerial and centrally monitored by reorganising the Faculty, School, and Department structure into larger units, introducing an Annual Research Monitoring Review (as of 2004)—which monitors four publications and external research income annually—in all Schools, introducing a mentoring scheme for young staff, reinforcing administration support for research, and setting up the longer study leave system. Two interviewees at both the University's centre and unit levels emphasised that the rationale behind the change was not, however, only for the 2008 RAE, but more importantly a change of the VC, who sets up institutional strategic policy on the creation of the internationally competitive institution.

University C

University C is a civic university. The management of University C exemplifies the case of the transformation from collegial based RAE management to the combination of collegiality and managerialism. Interviewees indicated that the change was in the cultural rather than the organisational structure between 1996 and 2001, while there was dynamic structural change and a power shift from the Heads of Departments to the Deans and from the units to the VC, following the change of VC after the 2001 RAE.

Before 1996, RAE management was, to a large extent, based upon the traditional collegial style, in which RAE management was the full responsibility of the Heads of

Departments. Nevertheless, the rise of managerialism was observed at Department level by providing the Heads of Departments with compulsory training in RAE management. Subsequently, the role of the Heads of Departments started to change towards being more managerial.

After the 1996 RAE, managerialism at the institutional level and the centralisation of the RAE management were seen in University C. The establishment of the central Research Committee (RC)—which monitored (and still monitors) the Departments—as well as the new appointment of a Pro-VC for research—is testimony to the rise of central management. The Research Committee and the internal Research Assessment Panel were significant in monitoring the units for the 2001 RAE, as one interviewee illustrated:

Two senior academics in RC went to the Departments to discuss with the Heads of Departments regarding strategies, publication issues, the preparation of the RAE, and postgraduate studies. The discussion between RC and panels sometimes influenced the selection of research actives, concerning (estimated) rating. It was the Heads of Departments' responsibility to discuss individual staff to get four best publications and to prepare other sections of the RAE. RC was crucial, and it reported to the Committee of the Deans, which was subsequently reformed in 2002.

The increasing managerial culture does not mean the demise of collegiality. Another interviewee, a Head of Department, emphasised the continuity of collegiality, suggesting that research culture was still based upon staff collaboration:

... the Departments have tried very hard to cling on to collegiality at the Department level, by trying to work as a team and by trying to help weak members to develop and sometimes trying to fight against the Deans and P-VC. So there is sometimes considerable tension between the Deans and the Heads of Departments.

The cultural change seen in the Sociology Department between 1996 and 2001 was not only from collegiality to the mixture of collegiality and managerialism, but also from being relatively teaching-driven to being more research-intensive. An interviewee from the Department articulated cultural change in that period:

The change between 1996 and 2001 was more cultural. The Department became, by our choice, more research-oriented and we made our choice to do more research, but it was voluntary. Now (2005), it is said to be compulsory. The idea was to move towards a better balance between research and teaching. Too many departments had put too much stress on teaching. And so the Department was then encouraged to review its own research.

In the context of the Sociology Department, the interviewee suggested that the new research-intensive culture is still based upon the established sense of collegiality. Concomitantly, a new research approach which is embedded in network and collaboration between research active staff was, according to the interviewee, not seen previously in the Department because research active staff in the Sociology discipline tended to work by themselves. Her comment implies different cultural shifts of Departments—in particular differences between arts/social science and science/engineering—in an institution.

University D

University D is a post-1992 university. The analysis in the study indicates that management in the University has started to change towards being more centralised, strategic and managerial in the context of the RAE. It can be assumed that the difficulties on the selection of research actives in post-1992 universities are also true of University D, which could need central management.

It could be argued that the University's first experience of the RAE in 1992 heralded a cultural shift from teaching-oriented to more research-oriented, managerial, and top-down management from the VC to the Heads of Departments and research groups. The apparent shift was, according to interviewees, seen around the 1996 RAE. Interviewees at both institutional and unit levels confirmed that there was a significant cultural shift towards being research-oriented between 1996 and 2001. There was, however, not a substantial structural change during the period. An interviewee, the then Pro-VC for Research (he was also the chair of the Research Committee), illustrated the development of research culture in University D, referring to the previous RAE:

The University learned a lot in the experience of 1992 RAE, which reflected in the 2001 RAE. For 1996 RAE, there was not enough time. The number of research centres was set up after 1996, which brought many people in the same area under the same group. RAE was still relatively new (for new universities) in the system. ...There was not central management before 1996 RAE. The radical change started just before 1996 RAE.

Another interviewee, the then Head of Faculty, related the change towards managerial culture to the change in the role of the Heads of Departments:

In the institution up to that point (around 1998), what they (people in management positions) had done was to give the best researchers the title of research professor and let them to get on it. They (research professors) did not engage in management in the Departments. There was loose management. Previously, management was led by those who were not interested in research at all ... Since 1998, everybody in key managerial positions, including all Heads of Departments, became researchers. That had a very clear effect. It changed the balance of priorities.

Such cultural change was related to the institutional strategies of the 2001 RAE and strong executive leadership. The principle of the institutional strategies was, according to some interviewees, to build up a research culture, attempting to change the teaching-oriented culture. The reform included the following: appointment of new staff who had good publication records, if budget allowed; the change in the criteria of promotion from being teaching and process-oriented (e.g. the experience of leading courses) to output-oriented in research and teaching (e.g. output of research and teaching programmes); a change in the Heads of Departments by locating research actives staff; the creation of the new post of Pro-VC for Research; the creation of a Research Committee consisting of the Pro-VC for Research and research co-ordinators in each Faculty; the establishment of a clear line of RAE management; a change in post-graduate structure; the introduction of internal training courses on research management and publication; and the encouragement of individual staff for the promotion of research activities and for submission to

highly recognised journals. Central monitoring of the submission of the 2001 RAE was, according to the then Pro-VC for Research and the then Head of Faculty, intensive; it implied monitoring each Department, and if necessary, contacting the leaders of research teams. The VC and Pro-VC for research made the final decision on selected research actives in the case of any difficulty in determining the boundaries of selection of research-active staff.

The side effect of such rapid cultural change between 1996 and 2001 was significant in University D. One interviewee pointed out that the shift from teaching to research-teaching culture brought about tension between selected research active staff and teaching-oriented, non-research-active staff.

Conclusion

The study has indicated that the 2001 RAE commonly brought about cultural change in selected civic and new universities, leading towards being more managerial, and research-oriented. The balance between collegiality and managerialism as well as the process of cultural change, however, differed between these universities. In University B as well as A, the VCs' and Pro-VCs' strategic management was rather limited, monitoring only the Departments which showed problematic performance in the 1996 RAE. In contrast, in Universities C and D, the VCs' and Pro-VCs' strategic, centralised management was significant, which included monitoring the Departments intensively and negotiating with Heads of Departments or research groups. Such monitoring and consequently the rapid change in the organisational culture towards being research-oriented caused side-effects—such as conflict between selected research actives and teaching-focused staff—in particular in the post-1992 university (University D).

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