

Research Activity Survey 2010:

Supplement for HEIs in Northern Ireland receiving recurrent funds for research from the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland

Executive summary

Purpose

1. This document asks higher education institutions (HEIs) in Northern Ireland to update information on research assistants and research fellows. It is a supplement to 'Research Activity Survey 2010' (HEFCE 2010/28).

Key points

2. The updated data will inform the distribution of research funds for the 2011-12 academic year.

3. All Northern Ireland HEIs that made submissions to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE2008) should complete this supplement as well as the main Research Activity Survey 2010 (2010 RAS). Where an institution wishes to make a nil return it should inform both HEFCE and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland in writing, either by letter or e-mail.

4. Institutions should note that the data reported to this supplement will need to be provided according to the RAE2008 'units of assessment' definitions.

5. This document provides:

- a. Guidance notes for completing this supplement to the 2010 Research Activity Survey.
- b. Definitions used in this supplement (Annex E).
- c. Example of the supplement tables (Annex F).
- d. Details of how to obtain workbook templates and return the data (Annex G).

6. We will make workbooks available to nominated data contacts at institutions in November 2010.

Action required

7. These supplemental data must be e-mailed to ras@hefce.ac.uk by **noon on Tuesday 14 December 2010**.

8. These supplemental data must be signed off as correct by the vice-chancellor or principal of the institution by **Thursday 13 January 2011**.

Background

9. The 2010 RAS asks higher education institutions (HEIs) to update data from the 2009 survey on fundable postgraduate research students who are eligible to pay home and EC fees. These data will inform the distribution of the research degree programme supervision funding for 2011-12.
10. The survey also asks institutions to provide information on research income from charities. This will inform our charity support element of QR funds for 2011-12.
11. In the annex to your letter outlining your provisional recurrent grant for the academic year 2010-11 (May 2010) the funding method for research was described. The volume measure used in the calculation for mainstream quality-related research funding includes full-time equivalent (FTE) numbers of research assistants and research fellows. These data were collected through the Research Activity Survey prior to RAS08. The Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland wishes to continue to use these minor volume measures in its research funding method for future years. Therefore, we are asking higher education institutions in Northern Ireland to update information on research assistants and research fellows.

Contents of supplement

12. This supplement should be completed by institutions in Northern Ireland that have also been asked to make a submission to 2010 RAS. It asks for the FTE number of research assistants and research fellows at the census date of 31 July 2010 by unit of assessment (UOA).
13. When deciding which specific UOA research assistants should be returned to, institutions are advised to first identify the lead researcher (principal investigator) to whom they are linked. If that lead researcher was returned to RAE2008, then their research assistants should be returned to that same UOA. If, however, the lead researcher was not returned to RAE2008, their research assistants should be returned to the UOA which is closest in academic content.
14. The rules for making returns to multiple submissions and for departments which were not submitted to RAE2008 are the same as for 2010 RAS.

Outline timetable

15. In November 2010, an Excel workbook with spreadsheet versions of the tables in Annex F will be available for institutions. The following annexes should be used as a guide for completing the return:

- Annex E Notes on research assistants and research fellows
- Annex F Sample of form for completion
- Annex G Instructions for completing the workbook.

16. Institutions are required to submit these data no later than **noon on Tuesday 14 December 2010**. We will confirm that we have received the submission via e-mail. The data do not need to be formally signed off by the vice-chancellor or principal at this stage. However, it is good practice for a senior member of the institution to agree the return prior to submission.

17. During the latter half of December 2010, we will write to institutions enclosing a copy of their RAS data. Institutions will be asked to:

- verify that the data are an accurate record, or make corrections
- answer any questions we may have on the data.

The timetable for this verification process is tight: if corrections to data are made we then reissue the data for re-verification by institutions. We will expect responses to our questions about data within five working days, together with notification of any amendments.

18. By **Thursday 13 January 2011**, all institutions must have signed off these data alongside their main 2010 RAS data as being correct as at the census date. The data should be signed off by the vice-chancellor or principal of the institution, and they should assess the return for accuracy and completeness before signing it off. If an institution fails to meet the deadline for signing off data, or we believe the data to be inaccurate, we reserve the right to use our own estimates of data to inform funding allocations. We cannot guarantee that any amendments to data after 13 January 2011 will be taken into account.

Returns

19. Returns must be e-mailed to ras@hefce.ac.uk no later than **noon on Tuesday 14 December 2010**. Annex G contains further details, and a full explanation will be sent out to nominated data contacts in November 2010.

20. This supplemental data must be signed off as correct by the vice-chancellor or principal of the institution by **Thursday 13 January 2011**.

Audit

21. We will continue our regular programme of audits of data used for funding purposes. Institutions should therefore keep an adequate audit trail recording how the data were derived, and should be able to rebuild this return for audit purposes. Where appropriate, our auditors will also seek to rely on any relevant internal audit work that has been carried out.

22. Our audits of data are likely to investigate areas of concern emerging from past RAS audit findings and a review of the systems and protocols used in deriving the data returned to RAS by institutions. The following aspects of this supplemental return are likely to be covered:

- documentation supporting the grade and FTE of research assistants and research fellows
- evidence of research assistants and research fellows being employed on the staff census date.

23. An institution is more likely to be audited if its return is late, incomplete or there are large, unexplained differences from previous years' data.

24. Previous audit findings will be described in the relevant sections of this document and institutions should be mindful of these when compiling the return.

25. The knowledge required to prepare the RAS return is often undocumented and sometimes lies with only one person. This creates a risk that, in the absence of the person concerned, particularly at crucial times of the year, the institution may not be able to prepare the return on

time or to the appropriate standard. A good audit trail helps to reduce this risk, but we also consider it good practice for all institutions to manage this risk effectively, by ensuring that at least two people can both produce the information for the main and supplemental return and prepare the RAS return itself.

26. In addition, institutions should consider ensuring that the relevant processes are adequately documented and that this documentation is kept up to date. This requires all relevant staff, including experienced staff, to consider the two parts of the RAS return each year and to make the necessary changes to their systems.

Annex E Notes on research assistants and research fellows

Research assistants

1. Research assistants are individuals who are on the payroll of the reporting institution and who hold a contract of employment with the institution. They are academic staff whose primary employment function is defined as 'Research only'. They would usually be funded from research grants or contracts from Research Councils, charities, the European Union or other overseas sources, industry, or other commercial enterprises, but they may also be funded from the institution's own funds. The research assistants reported to this survey should be in post on the census date of 31 July 2010. The criteria for research assistants are the same as in RAS07 (HEFCE 2007/31). Individuals who meet this definition but are described in HEIs' grading structures as something other than research assistant (for example research associate, assistant researcher) may be returned as research assistants provided they meet this definition.
2. Senior research assistants who are named as principal investigator on a research grant or contract, or who function in that capacity, should be excluded from this survey. This is because they come within the definition of principal researcher, and so would be counted as research active staff at an RAE census date.
3. Research fellows should not be counted as research assistants.
4. Knowledge Transfer Partnership Associates should normally be excluded from this survey, except where they function as a research assistant and are based within a department of the reporting institution.

Research fellows

5. For the purposes of this survey supplement, research fellows are members of academic staff who hold specific awards on the basis of their own research record or research proposals. Examples of such fellowships are Research Council Fellows (senior, advanced and post-doctoral) and Royal Society Research Fellows and Professors. The research fellows reported to this survey supplement should be in post on the census date of 31 July 2010. Visiting fellows should be excluded.
6. A fellowship should be awarded to a named individual in recognition of independent research achieved or proposed, rather than being awarded to the research project on which an individual is employed. Fellowships should only be recorded as such when they are periodically subjected to significant expert peer review (including competitive review), generally involving an input from outside the institution. Fellowships are often for a fixed term, typically three or five years. Funding for these awards comes from a range of sources outside the institution, but can be channelled through it so that the individual remains an employee of the institution.

Audit tip: Classification of research fellows

Institutions should return research staff as research fellows in accordance with these guidelines and not simply by titles they have given to staff internally. They should make available contracts of employment or fellowship certificates at the time of the audit as documentary evidence to verify the grades being returned.

7. Staff on an HEI-funded or awarded fellowship, even with external referees involved in the selection process, should be excluded from the 2010 RAS.
8. Research fellows who receive funding directly from their sponsoring bodies, as is the case for NATO and UN fellowships, should be excluded from this survey supplement.
9. Research Councils UK fellowships should be excluded from this survey supplement, as the Research Councils award the fellowships to institutions, not to individuals, in the first instance.
10. For the purposes of this survey, institutions should update the total FTE of research fellows returned to the 2009 RAS supplement. The value used for 2010-11 funding in each unit of assessment is included on form R3 – figures entered by the institution should be an update of this total for each unit of assessment.

Audit tip: Census date for the staff return

The census date for the staff return is 31 July 2010, and only eligible research staff still on the payroll of an institution at that date should be included in the return. The institution should take care to ensure only eligible staff are in the return, and not those who have not yet commenced employment or who had already left by that date. There should be a contract of employment for the staff member that covers the census date, which should be available for audit.

Audit tip: FTE of staff

The FTE of a staff member in the return should be reconcilable to a contract of employment relevant to the census date, and this should be available for audit.

Annex F Samples of forms for completion

This annex can be downloaded from the HEFCE web-site as an Excel file alongside this report.

Annex G Instructions for completing the workbook

1. Workbooks with spreadsheet versions of the tables in Annex F will be available for institutions in November 2010. In November, vice-chancellors/principals and RAS contacts will be sent the workbook via the HEFCE RAS e-mail address (ras@hefce.ac.uk). Institutions should e-mail the completed workbook to the same e-mail address as an attachment.

2. The workbook will be saved in Excel 2003 format and called RAS10NI supplement____.xls, where the suffix identifies your institution. Please do not attempt to rename or reformat the file as our computer systems for loading institutions' returns depend on the file-naming convention and file formats. The workbook will contain one worksheet:

R3____ Research assistants and research fellows.

3. All labels and table formats will be protected. Institutions must not attempt to alter the format of the tables by adding or deleting columns or rows. Only cells where data are required should be altered, and the worksheet returned should have the same name and format as that originally supplied.

4. Completed returns (or confirmation of a nil return) must be submitted to the HEFCE RAS e-mail address no later than **noon on Tuesday 14 December 2010**. When the return has been successfully received, a confirmation message will be sent.

5. These supplemental data must be signed off as correct by the vice-chancellor or principal of the institution by **Thursday 13 January 2011**.