October 2003/49

Core funding

Request for data

Completed forms should be returned by Monday 15 December

This document asks higher education institutions to update data on research students, research assistants, research fellows and income from charities. These data will inform quality-related research (QR) funding for the academic year 2004-05. It also asks institutions to update data on fundable research students who are eligible to pay home and EC fees.

Research Activity Survey 2003

HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND

Research Activity Survey 2003

To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions Heads of universities in Northern Ireland
Of interest to those responsible for	Research funding, Finance, Data collection
Reference	2003/**49**
Publication date	October 2003
Enquiries to	Hannah Wood tel 0117 931 7395 e-mail ras@hefce.ac.uk

Executive summary

Purpose

1. This document asks higher education institutions (HEIs) to update information on their research activity.

Key points

2. The updated data will inform our distribution of research funds for the academic year 2004-05.

3. All HEIs that made submissions to the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) should complete this survey. Where there is no information to update and a nil return applies, institutions should confirm this nil return by letter.

4. This document provides:

   a. Guidance notes for completing the Research Activity Survey 2003 (RAS03).
   b. Definitions used in the RAS03 survey.
   c. Examples of the survey tables.
   d. Details of how to obtain templates and upload data are given in Annex E. From this year, there is no longer a requirement to return an additional hard copy.

5. Workbooks will be made available to nominated data contacts at institutions in November 2003.

Action required

6. Survey data should be sent to us by **Monday 15 December 2003**.

Background

7. The 2003 Research Activity Survey asks institutions to update data on all research students, research assistants, research fellows and research income from UK charities. These data will inform quality-related research (QR) funding for 2004-05. Data on research-active staff, also used to inform QR funding, will continue to be taken from the submissions to the 2001 RAE.

8. The survey also asks institutions to update data from the 2002 survey on fundable research students who are eligible to pay home and EC fees. We need these data in order to distribute funds for the tuition and supervision of research students, which were transferred from the teaching model to the research model for 1998-99 onwards.

Quality-related research funding

9. This survey should be completed by HEIs that made submissions to the 2001 RAE. It asks for the following data **by unit of assessment**:

a. Students eligible to pay home and EC **and** overseas fees (including students domiciled in the Channel Islands and Isle of Man). We ask for the data to be returned by year of programme in the following way:

i. The headcount of students on research-based higher degrees for whom the year of programme of study falling on 1 December 2003 is full-time.

ii. The headcount **and** full-time equivalent (FTE) number of students on research-based higher degrees for whom the year of programme of study falling on 1 December 2003 is part-time.

b. Students eligible to pay home and EC fees (see Annex A, paragraph 21). We ask for the data to be returned by year of programme in the following way:

i. The headcount of students on research-based higher degrees for whom the year of programme of study falling on 1 December 2003 is full-time.

ii. The headcount **and** FTE of students on research-based higher degrees for whom the year of programme of study falling on 1 December 2003 is part-time.

c. The FTE number of research assistants and research fellows at the census date of 31 July 2003.

d. Income from research grants and contracts from UK-based charities during the financial year 2002-03.

10. This survey allows institutions to make separate returns for each multiple submission made to a unit of assessment in the 2001 RAE. If making separate returns for multiple submissions is not practical, areas on the return can be made available to submit totals for the unit of assessment. The institution should contact us to obtain the password to unlock these rows for editing.

11. If a department was not submitted to the 2001 RAE, we would like its data to be returned to the applicable unit of assessment, or one that is closest in academic content. We will be using all the information, irrespective of rating or RAE submission status, to cross-check institutions' data against other sources such as the Higher Education Students Early Statistics (HESES) survey and the HESA finance and staff records.

Outline timetable and process for the 2004-05 funding round

12. Enquiries about this survey should be addressed to Hannah Wood (tel 0117 931 7395, e-mail ras@hefce.ac.uk). We will use an e-mail list of RAS contacts to notify institutions of any changes or updates to the survey. If institutions wish to check or change these RAS contact details they should speak to their HEFCE higher education adviser. The HEFCE higher education adviser for each institution can be found on the web, www.hefce.ac.uk, under About us/HEFCE people/Staff.

13. In November 2003, an Excel workbook with spreadsheet versions of the tables in Annex D will be available for institutions to download. The following annexes should be used as a guide for completing the return:

Annex A Notes on research students

Annex B Notes on research assistants and fellows

Annex C Notes on income from charities

Annex D Samples of forms for completion

Annex E Instructions for completing the workbook

Annex F Audit of RAS02.

14. Institutions are required to submit their Research Activity Survey data no later than 15 December 2003. We will confirm receipt of all submissions. There are validation checks within the template to ensure part-time students are returned correctly, but when we receive the data, we carry out a number of other validation and credibility checks.

15. During December, HEFCE higher education advisers will write to institutions enclosing a printout of their Research Activity Survey and comparison tables generated from the data. Institutions will be asked to:

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

16. By 13 January 2004, all institutions must have signed off their Research Activity data as being correct as at the census date, but this is **not** an opportunity for institutions to update their data. The timetable for this is tight: if corrections to data are made, we then reissue the data for re-verification by institutions. We will expect responses to questions about data within five working days.

17. We will announce provisional allocations of recurrent grant for 2004-05 in early March 2004.

Authorisation of the Research Activity Survey return

18. At the end of the verification process described in paragraph 15, we will require the vice-chancellor/principal or their most appropriate deputy to sign off a printout of the return on the institution's behalf. This independent reviewer should ideally be senior to the person preparing the return, and should broadly assess that the data are reasonable before signing off the return. This requires the reviewer to understand our data collection requirements, to ensure that the institution has systems capable of producing an accurate and complete return, and to ensure that the person preparing the return has compiled it competently.

Returns

19. Returns should be submitted electronically to the secure web-site no later than Monday 15 December 2003. This year completed workbooks should be submitted by uploading to a secure web-site, instead of being returned by e-mail. Annex E contains further details, and a full explanation will be sent out to nominated data contacts with passwords and other relevant documentation in November.

20. Further education colleges should not respond to this survey.

Audit

21. For RAS02, we audited 11 institutions and reviewed the systems and protocols used in deriving the data returned to the survey by these HEIs. These audits are not yet complete, but at the time of writing we were looking at the following aspects of the return:

- evidence of registration and continuing activity of students
- documentation supporting year of study
- evidence for the FTE of part-time students
- reconciliation of RAS and HESES student numbers
- documentation supporting the grade and FTE of research staff
- evidence of staff being employed on the staff census date
- reconciliation of UK charity income returned to the RAS and to the HESA finance record.

22. Institutions should therefore keep an adequate audit trail recording how the data were derived and should be able to rebuild the return for audit purposes. Where appropriate, our auditors will also seek to rely on any relevant internal audit work that has been carried out.

23. An institution is more likely to be audited if its return is late, incomplete or there are large unexplained differences on previous years’ data. To help prepare explanations on these differences, there is a comparison table in the template that compares RAS02 data with the RAS03 data as entered on the return.

Summary of changes and clarifications since RAS02

24. Students from countries joining the EC during the 2003-04 academic year should only be returned on forms R1a or R1b in RAS03. They should not be returned on forms R2a and R2b. We will use 2002-03 HESA data to determine any adjustments in funding calculations arising from the EC enlargement.

25. As was done for RAS02, institutions should download their blank workbooks from the secure web-site. This year, however, completed workbooks should be submitted by uploading to the same web-site, instead of being returned by e-mail.

26. Notes on our auditing procedures for the RAS have been added.

27. Annex A has been updated to give guidance on returning students on New Route PhDs.

28. Annex A has also been changed to clarify our position on returning students supported by Research Councils (and other EC public sources) to forms R2a and R2b.

29. Annex B has been modified slightly to clarify our position on research fellows.

Annex A

Notes on research students

1. All students included in this survey should be postgraduate students registered at the reporting institution for a research-based higher degree. The students should be actively supervised by an academic member of staff employed by a higher education institution in England. Students who spend the whole of their programme of study outside the UK should not be included in this survey, except where they satisfy the criteria in paragraph 22c.

2. The criteria for data in forms R1a and R1b are the same as in the 2002 Research Activity Survey (see paragraphs 3 to 7 below). Data from these two forms are currently used as part of the volume measure for research funding allocations. Other than small clarifications on the position of students supported by the Research Councils, the criteria for data in forms R2a and R2b are the same as in the 2002 Research Activity Survey. Data from these forms R2a and R2b will be used to allocate funds for the tuition and supervision of postgraduate research students.

3. The data returned on forms R1a and R2a should be headcounts of students for whom the year of programme of study falling on 1 December 2003 is full-time. Data returned on forms R1b and R2b should be headcounts **and** FTEs of students for whom the year of programme of study falling on 1 December 2003 is part-time. FTE should normally be expressed to two decimal places, and headcounts should normally be whole numbers unless a student has been split between units of assessment.

4. In some cases a student may not study for a full year in their final year of programme of study (for example, the second year of programme of a 15-month MPhil programme). Here the student should be recorded as part-time in their final year, with an FTE reflecting the proportion of a full year for which they have studied. This should be recorded even if the student is not actively pursuing studies on 1 December in their final year.

5. The year of programme of study is used in the distribution of funds for research, and care needs to be taken when there is a change in a student's mode of study. Full-time students with a part-time final year (see previous paragraph) should have this final year returned under the appropriate year of programme in the part-time table. In assigning year of programme, the examples below and the guidance in paragraph 19 below can be used to convert the student's completed full-time years into part-time years.

Examples

6. A student started a full-time 15-month MPhil in September 2002. This student would have been returned to the 2002 Research Activity Survey as one headcount full-time student on 1 December 2002. The student should be returned to the 2003 survey (even though they will not be studying on 1 December 2003) as one headcount part-time student with 0.25 FTE under year of programme three, their first year of full-time study having been converted into two years of part-time study.

7. A student started a part-time PhD in September 2001, and completed two years with an FTE of 0.5. This student would have been returned to the 2001 and 2002 Research Activity Surveys as a part-time student on 1 December 2001 and 1 December 2002, respectively. If they then decide to continue

the degree as a full-time student, the two part-time years of study would be converted to one full-time year. The student should therefore be returned to the 2003 survey as one headcount full-time student under year of programme two.

Definition of registration

8. For this survey, registration is defined as a binding undertaking by a student to pay a fee for tuition, or supervision of research, for a programme of study. If in some circumstances all or part of the fee has been waived, the student will be regarded as registered. A student is assumed to register with the reporting institution annually on the anniversary of the initial registration. The simple acceptance of a place does not qualify a student to be counted in this survey.

9. Where a student has been registered at one institution and taught under a franchising arrangement at another institution, only the registering institution should return the student to this survey. A student can only be registered at one institution for any individual qualification. A student on a programme of study run jointly by more than one institution, and not the subject of a franchising arrangement, should be returned only by the institution which receives the fee.

Definition of year of programme of study

10. A student's first year of programme of study starts when they first begin studying towards the qualification. Subsequent years of programme of study start on or near the anniversary of this date.

Definition of full-time equivalence

11. For the purpose of this survey, a student's FTE refers to the amount of study undertaken in the year of programme of study compared to a full-time student with the same qualification aim studying for a full year. A student is said to be full-time if they are normally required to attend the institution, or elsewhere, for periods amounting to at least 24 weeks within the year of programme of study; and during that time are normally expected to undertake periods of study which amount to an average of at least 21 hours per week.

Research-based higher degrees

12. In accord with normal practice in the English higher education sector, a higher degree by research should be one awarded primarily on the basis of a substantial thesis (or equivalent) submitted by the student and resulting from the student’s original research. Regulations on the appointment of examiners for the degree should stipulate that the student’s work is examined by at least two examiners, individually appointed for the student, one of whom is an external examiner. An exception may be allowed for departments which were highly rated in the 2001 RAE, where it may be that the two best-qualified examiners are both internal.

13. Students who have completed their research work and are writing up their thesis (or equivalent) should be excluded. Students are considered to be writing-up where they have completed their research work and will not undertake any significant additional research. Such students often still receive a small amount of supervision and they may still have access to other facilities at the institution, but they should still be treated as writing-up. Students registered for research qualifications awarded primarily on the basis of published works should also be excluded, unless they are undertaking a significant amount of research at the institution.

14. Some specialist doctoral degrees, such as the Doctor of Education (EdD) and the Doctor of Clinical Psychology (DClinPsychol), typically include significant taught components and supervised practice, as well as requiring the student to produce a dissertation or thesis. These degrees do not generally require the student to produce the same amount of original research as a PhD. Students registered for a specialist doctoral degree should only be included in this survey if the degree satisfies the criteria in paragraph 12.

New Route PhDs

15. New Route PhDs are four-year postgraduate courses offering a mixture of taught elements, training in professional skills, and a substantial research programme. As the timing and balance of these components varies among separate New Route programmes, we consider that for funding purposes students on these courses should be counted in the same way as those on the more traditional three-year PhDs. This would mean that full-time students on these programmes would count within our formula for teaching funding for the first year of their New Route PhD, and then count within our formula for research funding for the second and third years of their New Route PhD. (Students reported as being in their fourth year are not currently counted in the HEFCE funding formulae, but we understand that there would be no such students for the 2003 Research Activity Survey since the first cohort of New Route PhD students enrolled in 2001.) We will reconsider the way these and other four-year postgraduate degree courses are funded following our consultation on the review of research funding, in which we are proposing changes to the way HEFCE funds research students from 2005-06 onwards.

Returning students to the survey

16. Students employed by outside research organisations, and based outside the department for most of their study, can be included if they satisfy the criteria in paragraphs 1 to 14.

17. Research students should normally be returned to the unit of assessment in which their supervisor is returned. Students who are supervised across more than one unit of assessment should be returned split either according to the agreed division of supervision or in proportion to the number of supervisors. Figures can be returned to two decimal places.

18. Academic staff who are also registered for a research-based higher degree at the same institution can be returned to this survey as research students, provided that the sum of the individual's staff FTE and student FTE does not exceed 1 on the staff census date of 31 July 2003. This is to prevent 'double counting' of an individual's research activity within the research volume measure.

19. In distributing funds for research in 2004-05, we intend to use a weighted student number count as shown in Table 1. The year of programme is defined in the 2002-03 HESA Student Record Coding Manual (Field 72) and indicates the year of the programme that the student is currently studying.

Table 1 Weightings for distributing research funds

Year of programme	**01**	**02**	**03**	**04**	**05**	**06**	**07+**
Weight applied to **headcount** of full-time students	0	1.75	1.75	0	0	0	0
Weight applied to **FTE** of part-time students	0	0	1.75	1.75	1.75	1.75	0

20. There may be cases where research students change their mode of study from full-time to part-time. For simplicity, in such cases, each year of full-time study should be treated as two years of part-time study in this survey. For example, a student who has completed three years of full-time study and is then taken on as a part-time student until the programme of study is completed, should be shown as a

seventh year part-time student during their first year of part-time study, and as an eighth year student for the second year of part-time study, and so on.

21. To distribute the funds for the tuition and supervision of research students, we will be using home and EC fundable students. Students are classified as home and EC if they can be regarded as eligible students as defined by Schedule 1 of the Education (Student Support) Regulations 2002 (SI 2002 No. 195). The Education (Student Support) Regulations can be found on the HMSO web-site – www.hmso.gov.uk under Legislation, UK, then Statutory Instruments. Home and EC students should be included on forms R2a and R2b if they are on programmes of recognised higher education that are open to any suitably qualified candidate. These students should also satisfy the criteria in paragraphs 1 to 20.

22. The following students should be excluded from forms R2a and R2b:

a. Students whose places are funded from another EC public source (for example, UK Research Councils, the Department of Health, the NHS, or the Home Office) where funding is provided in addition to the recommended fee levels, pro-rata for part-time students. However, the students can be included where the EC public source is paying the fees at or below the normal fee levels.

b. Students on programmes of study franchised to institutions wholly outside the UK, unless we have specifically sanctioned the programme as eligible.

c. Students spending most of their programme of study outside the UK, except where:

i. There is a clear academic reason for studying abroad rather than in the UK. Even where such a reason exists, we must specifically sanction the programme as eligible.

ii. The student is temporarily and unavoidably abroad and remains liable to UK tax on their earnings, or is a dependant of such a person. This includes members of HM Forces and their dependants.

d. EC students registered for a qualification awarded jointly by a UK and an EC institution may be returned to this survey, but only while they are studying in the UK and as long as their study in the UK is not being directly or indirectly funded from an EC public source (see paragraph 22a).

e. Students franchised to an institution that is not an HEI supported from public funds. Where institutions have franchise agreements with any other organisation and wish these students to be eligible for funding, they should contact us for approval.

23. Students from countries joining the EC during the 2003-04 academic year should only be returned on forms R1a or R1b in RAS03. They should not be returned on forms R2a and R2b. We will use 2002-03 HESA data to determine any adjustments in funding calculations arising from the EC enlargement.

Annex B

Notes on research assistants and fellows

Research assistants

1. Research assistants are individuals who are on the payroll of the 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 should be employees of the reporting institution, and would usually be funded from research grants or contracts from Research Councils, charities or industry, but may also be funded from the institution’s general funds. The research assistants reported to this survey should be in post on the census date of 31 July 2003. The criteria for research assistants are the same as in the 2002 Research Activity Survey.

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 return. 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 (see paragraph 9).

4. Teaching company 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.

5. We want to maintain the distinction made in the 2001 RAE between post-doctoral research assistants and postgraduate research assistants. Clinical research assistants who are not on the pay scales specified below, for example those funded by the Medical Research Council, should be returned on form R3 according to whether they function as post-doctoral or postgraduate research assistants.

6. Research assistants graded 1A and above on the former University Authorities Panel (UAP) pay scales, or graded B and above in the former Polytechnics and Colleges Employers Forum (PCEF) pay scales, should be returned to this survey as post-doctoral research assistants.

7. Research assistants graded 1B on the former UAP pay scales, or graded A in the former PCEF pay scales, should be returned to this survey as postgraduate research assistants.

8. Institutions which have adopted locally determined pay scales should apply a mapping of these pay scales onto the UAP or PCEF pay scales, as appropriate, to distinguish post-doctoral research assistants from postgraduate research assistants. The former normally have a research-based higher degree. Postgraduate research assistants normally do not have a research-based degree and are more junior.

Research fellows

9. For the purposes of this survey, 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 should be in post on the census date of 31 July 2003.

10. 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.

11. Research fellows who receive funding directly from their sponsoring bodies, as is the case for NATO and UN fellowships, should not be returned in this survey. Visiting fellows should also be excluded.

12. For the purposes of this survey, institutions should update the total FTE of research fellows from the 2002 RAS. The value used for 2003-04 funding in each unit of assessment is included on form RA3 – figures entered by the institution should be an update of this total for each unit of assessment. The total FTE of a research active member of staff returned as a fellow should be multiplied by the percentage of their salary supported from specific funds to give the figure returned on this form.

Example

13. A research active member of staff would have been returned to the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise as a research fellow with an FTE of 1. This fellow has 80 per cent of his salary supported from specific funds, therefore should be returned to the 2003 RAS as a research fellow with an FTE of 0.8 (80% x 1 FTE).

Annex C

Notes on income from charities

1. Institutions are asked to provide information about research income from charitable foundations and trusts based in the United Kingdom in the financial year 2002-03 (1 August 2002 to 31 July 2003). The income should be in respect of research[1] carried out at the institution and for which directly related expenditure has been incurred.

2. The parts of grants awarded from the Joint Infrastructure Fund (JIF) or the Science Research Investment Fund (SRIF) that are provided from the Wellcome Trust or other charity funds should be **excluded**.

3. For those institutions not in receipt of grants awarded from the JIF or SRIF, the figures here should tally with those in the institution's annual financial statements and the 2002-03 HESA Finance Statistics Return (FSR). For all other institutions the discrepancy between the figures should be entirely due to JIF and SRIF. Table 4 of the HESA return requests institutions to provide the external research income by cost centre. However, for the purposes of calculating the QR grant this information is required by unit of assessment. For further guidance please consult the HESA Finance Record Coding Manual.

4. Where a grant or contract is held across more than one unit of assessment, its value should be divided in proportion to the number of grant or contract holders. If research projects are funded from a number of sources, their income should be allocated between respective headings.

[1] We use the Frascati definition of research (second chapter of the OECD 1993 Frascati manual, ISBN 9264142029), which can be summarised as original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. It excludes routine testing and analysis and the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research.

Annex D

Samples of forms for completion

(SEE SEPARATE EXCEL FILE)

Annex E

Instructions for completing the workbook

1. Workbooks with spreadsheet versions of the tables in Annex D will be available for institutions to download in November 2003. In November, vice-chancellors/principals and RAS contacts will be issued with an institution key (unique to each institution) and a RAS03 group key (unique to the RAS03 survey) to access the workbook through a secure web-site, **http://extranet.hefce.ac.uk**. This year, for the first time, institutions will electronically submit the completed workbook to the same web-site.

2. On viewing the welcome screen you will be asked to log in or register for access to the site. The first time that you visit, you must register. This involves typing in your e-mail address, your institution key, your RAS03 group key and setting a password (at least six characters long). Whenever you visit the site after registration, you will only need to enter your e-mail address and password. Full details on how to use the site, and your institutional and RAS03 keys, will be issued to vice-chancellors/principals and RAS contacts in November. In case of difficulty, please contact Hannah Wood on 0117 931 7395.

3. You can then download the blank RAS03 template, and save it somewhere on your system (the template cannot be completed online).

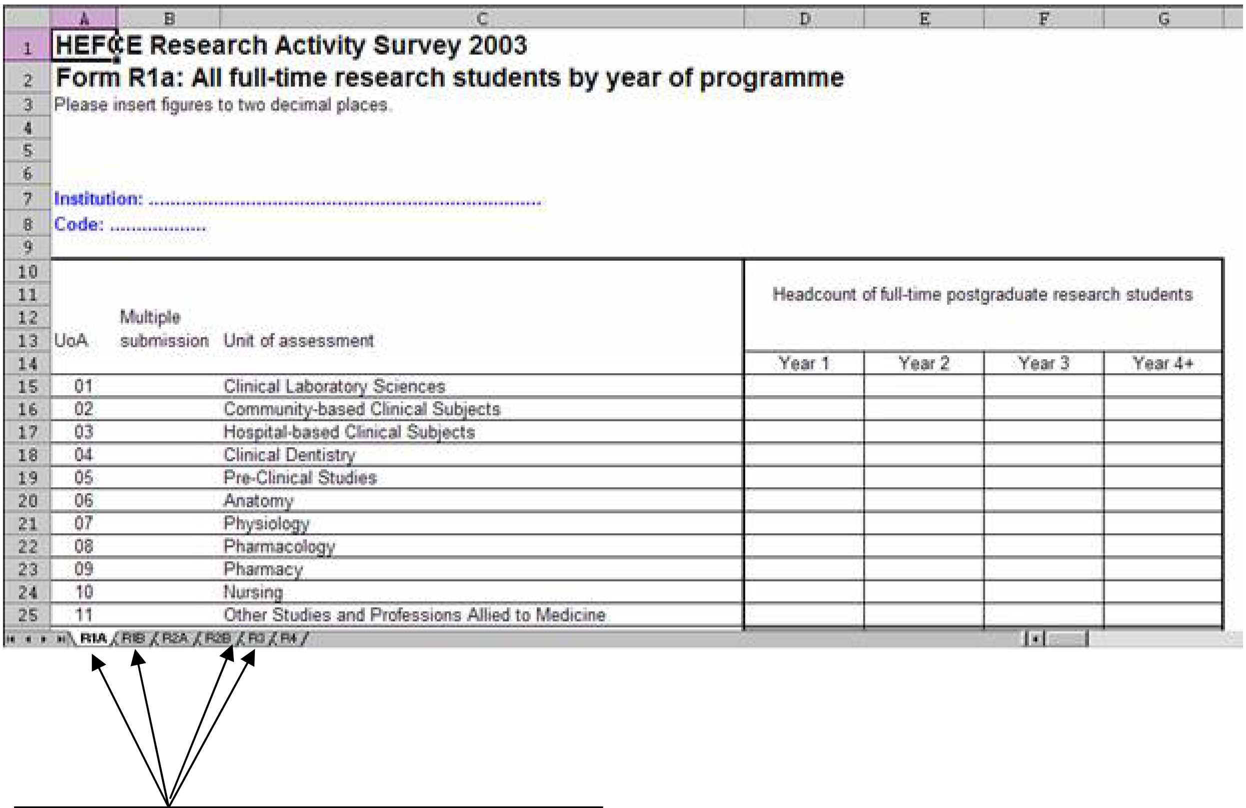
4. The workbook will be saved in Excel 97 format and called RAS03___.xls, where the suffix identifies your institution. Please do not attempt to rename or reformat the file as our computer systems for loading institutions' returns depend on the file-naming convention and file formats. The workbook will contain six worksheets, each with the same suffix as the workbook. These are as follows:

R1A_____	All full-time research students by year of programme
R1B_____	All part-time research students by year of programme
R2A_____	Fundable home and EC fee-paying full-time students by year of programme
R2B_____	Fundable home and EC fee-paying part-time students by year of programme
R3_____	Research assistants and research fellows
R4_____	Income from charities on account of research grants and contracts (financial year 2002-03).

5. 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 all worksheets returned should have the same name and format as those originally supplied.

6. Worksheets R1b and R2b contain validation checks to ensure headcounts and FTEs are returned correctly. Institutions should ensure their data pass all validation checks before uploading them.

7. Below is an example of how the worksheets are laid out in the workbook. Each table is on a separate worksheet, which is accessed by clicking on the tab at the bottom of the screen. The name of the worksheet is displayed on the tab.



HEFCE Research Activity Survey 2003

Form R1a: All full-time research students by year of programme

Please insert figures to two decimal places.

Institution: ....

Code: ....

UoA	Multiple submission	Unit of assessment	Headcount of full-time postgraduate research students			
			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4+
01		Clinical Laboratory Sciences				
02		Community-based Clinical Subjects				
03		Hospital-based Clinical Subjects				
04		Clinical Dentistry				
05		Pre-Clinical Studies				
06		Anatomy				
07		Physiology				
08		Pharmacology				
09		Pharmacy				
10		Nursing				
11		Other Studies and Professions Allied to Medicine				

Click on these tabs to open the worksheet that contains the table you want to fill in.

8. When the worksheets have been completed, the file should be saved. You should make a back-up copy of the completed tables before returning the completed survey to HEFCE. All worksheets in the workbook should be returned even if they contain no data.

9. Completed returns should be submitted to the secure web-site no later than Monday 15 December 2003. We will confirm receipt of all submissions.

Annex F

Audit of RAS02

1. For RAS02 we piloted an audit of the return at 11 institutions. At the time of preparing this publication, not all the audits had been completed. The completed audits highlighted areas in which some institutions were incorrectly interpreting the RAS guidance, or where internal institutional systems and practices did not facilitate the production of the RAS return. This annex lists common areas of misinterpretation so that in future years, institutions can improve their data quality.

2. The findings of the audits are presented under three headings:

- student data
- staff data
- income from charities data.

First the points needing attention are given as a bulleted list, then they are expanded on (paragraph 3 onwards).

Student data:

- lack of evidence of students' engagement with the course
- all part-time students being classified as having a load of 0.5 without any modelling carried out to ascertain whether or not this was appropriate
- inadequate audit trail between the student record system and the RAS return
- lack of analytical review of figures in the return to identify anomalies and to ensure the data make sense. In particular, a lack of a reconciliation between the RAS return and the HESES return to ensure each is correct in its own right
- inadequate records to ensure the students' years of programme of study are recorded correctly in the return, such as not correctly adjusting years of programme where students have changed from full-time to part-time, or vice versa
- data incomplete for students' supervisors and their departments
- poor communication between research offices and schools/departments
- insufficient checking of total FTEs where individuals are returned as both research staff and students, and a lack of understanding of the rules relating to their correct return
- students included in the return without an annual enrolment form providing the binding undertaking to pay their fees
- provisionally enrolled students included in the return who had not subsequently enrolled for the year
- misunderstandings of the rules regarding the correct return of students who receive funding from other EC sources
- students who are writing up are not clearly identified for exclusion from the return
- separate research student databases being used to provide figures for inclusion in the return, which are not up to date, and lack reconciliation between such systems and the main student record
- incidents of students backdating their suspension of studies to the beginning of the academic year, having already been included in the return
- students studying overseas not being sanctioned by HEFCE as required in the guidance
- students being returned by more than one institution

- poor knowledge management.

Staff data:

- classification of research assistants as postgraduate or postdoctoral not in accordance to the guidance
- classification of research fellows not in accordance with the guidance
- no link between the human resources system and payroll, and hence inclusion in the return of staff not eligible to be returned, and staff without contracts of employment covering the census date being included in the return
- lack of information to justify the FTEs of staff, or FTEs used in the return not being in agreement with contracts of employment
- lack of analytical review of figures in the return to identify anomalies and to ensure the data make sense.

Income from charities data:

- no reconciliation with the HESA financial return ensuring overall figures and assignment to units of assessment are correct
- no reconciliation with the financial statements.

3. Each of these points is expanded on below.

Student data

<u>Evidence of student engagement</u>

4. All institutions visited had an internal process of annual monitoring of students. Review of the resulting forms would have given good audit evidence about whether the student was engaging with the course. Many instances were encountered where such forms were not available for all students selected in the sample, so evidence that the student should be included in the return was not available. Such forms should be completed on at least an annual basis, and should be available for audit inspection if so required.

<u>Part-time loads</u>

5. All institutions visited gave all part-time students a standard load: in the main this was 0.5. No analysis had been carried out to ascertain whether students were active at this rate. In some instances evidence suggested that students were more active than that, and in others that they were less so. In future we would like to see some form of analysis to justify the part-time loads being used in the return.

<u>Inadequate audit trail</u>

6. In some cases, the audit trail between the student record systems and the RAS return was inadequate. Any relevant printouts and working papers used in completing the return should be kept. This is particularly important where only one person is responsible for the return, as the return has to be

reproducible even if they leave. The audit trail should be retained for at least three years. Source documents such as registration forms should also be retained. Where an institution uses document image processing or other methods to store such information, the original documents should normally be retained for at least one year, and the copy retained for at least a further two years.

Analytical reviews and data reconciliations

7. Someone independent to the compiler of the return should make a careful review of figures in the return, to ensure the figures make sense in respect to the back-up data, and to ensure basic inputting errors have not occurred. This will increase the accuracy of the returns being submitted.

8. A reconciliation between the RAS return and the HESES return should be made, and any differences identified to ensure they are bona fide. The reconciliation should be retained with the working papers of both returns, so it can be reviewed at a future time if necessary.

Student year of programme

9. Due to poor data quality in some instances, there was a lack of evidence to verify the year of programme that students should have been returned in. Accurate records must be maintained showing students' current year of programme. Particular care needs to be taken where a student has suspended studies at some stage of the course, or where they have transferred from full-time to part-time or vice versa.

Supervisory responsibilities

10. In some instances the record of the student's supervisor had not been kept up to date, and in some instances had not been kept at all. This would mean that the assignment of the student to the correct unit of assessment was difficult to ascertain and to verify. It is important that these data are kept up to date, detailing any changes to the supervisory responsibilities.

Communications between research offices and schools/departments

11. Where separate research offices are responsible for maintaining the research student database, it is essential that good communication processes are set up between the office and relevant academic departments, to give a timely flow of data and ensure the student record system is up to date. This is of particular importance around the census date, but is also important throughout the year to get an accurate picture of students suspending their studies or deciding to withdraw from the course.

Research staff who are also research students

12. There is evidence of a lack of understanding of the correct returning of research staff who are also research students. This is allowed under the rules for inclusion, as long as their total FTE does not exceed 1 on the staff census date of 31 July 2003.

Annual registration of students

13. A condition of funding is that an annual binding undertaking is obtained to pay a fee for tuition, or supervision of research, for a programme of study. Evidence of this must be retained and be open to

inspection at the time of an audit. A lack of such evidence makes the students ineligible to be included in the return.

Provisional enrolment

14. As with the rule in paragraph 13 above, students who are only provisionally enrolled at the census date should not be included in the return, as they may subsequently not enrol. It is important to stress to both students and staff the importance of the census date, and to ensure all relevant students have undergone the registration process in time for that date.

Students receiving funds from other EC sources

15. The rules for students receiving funds from other EC sources are detailed in Annex A paragraph 22a. Students are permitted to be included in forms R2a and R2b of the return if their funding is up to the recommended fee level for their mode of study.

Writing up students

16. Students who are writing up their theses should be clearly identified for exclusion from the return. Instances were found where the annual monitoring forms of students for the previous academic year were identifying students as being ‘writing up’ for the following year, but they were included in the subsequent return.

Separate databases and reconciliation with the main system

17. There were a number of instances where a separate research student database was maintained to record student progress and activity, as the main student record system was unable to record the detail of information required to monitor research students. There is no problem with this, but it is essential that a reconciliation between the two systems is maintained, and any anomalies adjusted in a timely fashion. An instance was found where there were such separate systems but differences between the systems had not been identified or reviewed, giving a lack of confidence in the data.

18. Additionally, if the research student database is to be used as the source for data for the return, it must be kept up to date. An instance was encountered where the research database was used for data for the return, but was only updated following a research degree board meeting, which was last held some months before the return date. This led to out-of-date data relating to students being used in production of the return.

Backdating of students’ suspension of their studies

19. Incidents of students backdating their suspension of studies have been encountered, meaning that students are included in the return when they are not in fact registered as studying in the year. Students should only be allowed to date their suspension from the time they stopped their studies: this should be advised to the relevant authorities in a timely fashion, and amendments made to the student record system as soon as possible having received the information.

Students studying overseas

20. Incidents of students included in the returns who are studying overseas have been encountered during the audits. Rules concerning whether or not they can be included in the return are detailed in

paragraph 22c of Annex A. Instances where students are studying abroad for a clear academic reason must be sanctioned by HEFCE before they are eligible to be returned.

Students registered at more than one institution

21. An incident of students being included in the return of two individual institutions was encountered during the audits. If a franchise or partnership arrangement has been set up, it is important that only one institution includes the student on their return. That institution should be the one receiving the fee for the student, and is therefore the lead institution for that student. The franchise institution should ensure it provides the necessary information to the lead institution in a timely fashion so the student can be included correctly in its return.

Knowledge management

22. At many institutions, the knowledge required to prepare the RAS return is 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 return and prepare the return itself.

23. 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 RAS each year and to make the necessary changes to their systems.

Staff data

Classification of research assistants as postgraduate or post-doctoral

24. The distinction between the two grades of research assistants, postgraduate or post-doctoral, is outlined in paragraphs 5-8 of Annex B, and these should be followed when deciding how research staff are to be returned in form R3. Research staff should not be submitted on the return in accordance with the particular status given internally by institutions, but should follow the guidelines given in the HEFCE RAS publication. The staff's contracts of employment should be available as documentary evidence at the time of the audit to verify the grades being returned.

Classification of research fellows

25. Research staff being returned as research fellows should be in accordance with the guidelines detailed in paragraphs 9-10 of Annex B, and not simply by titles given internally by institutions. The staff's contracts of employment or fellowship certificates should be available as documentary evidence at the time of the audit to verify the grades being returned.

Census date for the staff return

26. The census date for the staff return is 31 July, and only eligible research staff still on the payroll of an institution at that date should be included in the return. Care should be taken to ensure only eligible staff are in the return, and not those who have not yet commenced employment or who have 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.

FTE of staff

27. 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.

Analytical review of figures

28. Someone independent to the compiler of the return should make a careful review of figures in the return, to ensure the figures make sense in relation to the back-up data, and to ensure basic inputting errors have not occurred. This will increase the accuracy of the returns being submitted.

Income from charities data

Reconciliation with HESA financial returns and annual financial statements

29. Reconciliations to both the HESA financial return and the annual financial statements should be made to ensure details in the RAS return are in accordance with other data being produced by the institution.

List of abbreviations

EC	European Community
FTE	Full-time equivalent
FY	Financial year
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HESES	Higher Education Students Early Statistics
QR	Quality related research
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
RAS03	Research Activity Survey 2003
UoA	Unit of assessment