

THE RAE IN SCOTLAND: A KIWI PARTICIPANT-OBSERVER IN AN ANCIENT UNIVERSITY

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This article provides an analysis of the processes and likely impact of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) from the perspective of a participant observer in one location in an ancient University in Scotland, 2004–2008. Initially, the paper reviews the RAE in the wider context of neoliberal reforms in education before focussing on an adult-education department as the unit of analysis. The structures and processes in place for the 2008 RAE in the department and faculty are assessed and forecasts made of possible effects of the exercise on staff and the field of adult education.

Introduction

This paper investigates the Research Assessment Exercise in terms of the broader context of global neoliberal reforms, before focussing on the internal processes and likely impact on the academic field of adult education in one Scottish University. It is unapologetically a partial and somewhat personal view, reflecting the specific history of the Department of Adult and Continuing Education (DACE) at the University of Glasgow and my own professional history as an adult educator.¹ Initially, I analyse the wider context of the place of research in educational reforms, provide a glimpse of the wider Scottish University scene, the Department and what the RAE is supposed to achieve. Next, I explain my role in the RAE at the Faculty of Education, linked to wider aspirations of colleagues in terms of our collective work and research agenda. Finally, I estimate what is “good” and “bad” about the RAE in this specific discipline in relation to practice and professional identity.

Research as an embodiment of the neoliberal agenda

In order to understand the significance of the RAE in higher education, it is first necessary to analyse the broader economic and political movement of which it is a part. In general terms, many Western societies have engaged in neoliberal reforms to streamline Government expenditure and minimise the state’s engagement in social and economic affairs: in the UK Margaret Thatcher adopted the ideology of neoliberalism; in New Zealand Roger Douglas did similarly. The buzz words of accountability, efficiency, privatisation, heightened competition, deregulation and asset sales became popularised within this ideological framework. Translated into educational contexts, this ideology undergirded educational policy and practices including those incorporated into Universities. These institutions could no longer depend on the “generosity” of Government grants but had to become more commercially-oriented, entrepreneurial and act as businesses in an educational landscape. Given that the primary functions of universities have been in teaching, research and community service, none of these was to be exempt from financial stringency.

In assessing the role of universities in the UK post-Dearing report, Blake, Smith and Standish (1998) identify research as a fundamental site of concern for academics. In their discussion on “the normalisation of research”, they identify the following issues:

1. Changes in university funding, more particularly, reductions in money for students taught, have made universities aware of the importance of research funding.
2. Universities now operate in a quasi-market and need to compete for resources. The profile of a university is at least partially attributable to research productivity.
3. In the UK the removal of the binary divide (between polytechnics and traditional universities) has meant that each institution needs to focus on its distinctiveness.
4. The changing meaning of research itself; it has become increasingly commodified wherein publications assume major importance.

Codd (2005, 2006), in providing a platform for understanding the origins of the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF), looks to the British RAE as a primary referend. He asserts that the same neo-liberal ideology undergirds both initiatives, one which relies on “a new form of managerial accountability” (2006: 44). Essentially, as part of economic restructuring, information and knowledge creation become fundamental tools for getting the better of competitors. Tertiary education institutions become corporatised where annual statements of objectives are translated into measureable outputs. Funding for research is disconnected from teaching in a contestable market and becomes another knowledge commodity

The seriousness of this ideological manipulation should not be understated. What were previously collegial environments have become places where academic cultures are marginalised. In Codd’s words:

Traditional academic cultures of collegiality were replaced by managerial audit cultures and discourses of scholarship, learning and contemplation were subjugated to new discourses of quality, excellence and performance. (Codd, 2006: 44)

According to Codd (2005), universities have largely become providers of services to individual clients or customers. A culture of performativity pervades the academic context where once collegiality was the norm. In this regime universities demonstrate their prowess in research and teaching; knowledge and research get redefined in terms of outcomes to be assessed.

The wider university context

Scottish universities share many of the same characteristics of the British higher education sector in general, but they also share a commitment to national goals as espoused by the Scottish Government. This includes helping to create a knowledgeable and skilled workforce as well as an informed citizenry – see the report, *A Smart Successful Scotland* (Scottish Executive, 2005) as exemplifying this entrepreneurial agenda. Scotland is arguably becoming increasingly focussed on the issue of local autonomy and the establishment of a firm national identity, quite distinctive from the rest of Britain.

Universities throughout the UK can be roughly categorised into distinct types: the ancient universities established in mediaeval times; the “red brick” more provincially-oriented

universities of the early twentieth century (e.g. Leeds, Reading); post-war or modern universities (most of which were created in the 1960s to accommodate the baby boomers); and the post-1992 institutions (which are converted polytechnics characterised by intensive teaching and minor research orientation). In Glasgow, this hierarchy is discernible among the University of Glasgow, established in 1451, the University of Strathclyde, established in 1964, and Glasgow Caledonian University as the “new” University. The University of Glasgow positions itself as an élite university, the majority of its students arriving at the institution straight from school with high level qualifications. The University of Strathclyde tends to recruit a wider range of students, more of whom are mature-aged. Caledonian, with a more vocational emphasis, tends to attract the greatest proportion of non-traditional students and openly encourages part-time study for the most academically-diverse groups of students. At the University of Glasgow the strategic plan, *Building on Excellence* (University of Glasgow, 2007), promotes postgraduate study, internationalisation and research as its main platforms for development.

The department for which I was Head from April 2006 to March 2008 is one of four in the Faculty of Education created by a merger in 1999. The components were the departments of Education Studies and DACE at Glasgow along with the St Andrew’s Catholic College for Teacher Training at Bearsden, a northern middle-class suburb of Greater Glasgow. At present there are four departments: DACE with a history of over 50 years (see Hamilton & Slowey, 2005, for details of issues and trends of DACE, particularly of its strong liberal education philosophical base); Education Studies, which still retains some focus on non-teacher education work; Curriculum Studies and Religious Education. Formerly DACE operated as an independent department but outgrew its facilities and was required to become part of the new faculty for which staff had mixed enthusiasm. The primary focus of the other departments is on schooling where Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is the dominant form of provision. DACE arguably has gained strength from being a member of a larger, more robust entity, but has lost much of its independence. For instance, its budget is enmeshed amid that of the faculty; the performance of any single department ultimately impacts positively or negatively on that of the faculty. Hence, economic performance is very important; in this context DACE endeavours to retain its identity as Scotland’s major provider of adult education.

DACE is not an easy institution to summarise in terms of its activities and status. I was attracted to DACE from New Zealand for two reasons: firstly, it retains its integrity as both a provider of adult education, with a strong Open Programme for any member of the Glasgow community;² and as a place to study and research adult education as a discipline and field of practice; and secondly, there is a cadre of scholars/researchers in adult/community education in one relatively small geographical space in Scotland. DACE has a reputation within the UK and internationally as an eminent adult education department. It felt like a privilege to work there.

The Department offers both non-credit and credit programmes from open entry to PhD levels. At the “bottom level” there are many thousand of adult students who come to its Open Programme or Certificate in Higher Education courses.³ DACE also has a distinguished history as a key provider in Scotland of Access to University courses, community development and adult-education postgraduate programmes.

In research, the main focus of this article, DACE has retained sound output over the years which has probably helped to keep it intact when externally and internally reviewed.⁴ In 2004 a new unit for research, the Centre for Research and Development in Adult and Lifelong Learning (CRADALL), was established in the Faculty of Education, based on a DACE initiative. In its early years it has demonstrated close links with African partnerships but has not been financially viable as expected by senior leadership in the Faculty and the University. Early in 2008 a new appointment was made of an established academic in adult education who has a track record in securing significant grants and who should help to further boost the research culture of both the Department and the Faculty. Significantly, for this tale, this position replacement was not readily granted; as HOD I needed to “make a strong business case” to replace the former director of CRADALL, the Dean only being convinced when prominent academics/researchers in the field presented themselves. The field of adult education generally is very much practice-oriented; indeed, many of the existing DACE staff of just over 22 academics are from practice backgrounds whose main constituencies are local communities facing serious social issues and whose research capabilities are not pronounced.⁵

Adult education in Scotland

The position of DACE can only be understood in relation to wider political trends in Scotland and the shape of the field in this part of the world. The political imperatives for directions in education have already been described earlier in this paper. Universities, as instruments of British government, were also subject to these issues such that processes of increased hierarchical control ensued and quality assurance has come to the fore. Smith (2005) points to a regime of accountability, surveillance, monitoring and regulation in New Zealand universities. These are also prevalent in Scottish universities. As a Head of Department (HoD) of a large university department, my computer was greeted by almost daily requests for some forms of accountability from staff. As a case in point, the Task Allocation Survey (TAS) requires selected departments’ members to provide full information for random periods of a week’s duration on their research, teaching and administrative duties. Ostensibly, this information provides the University with up-to-date data on the tasks performed across the university as a whole as a source for future planning. However, it also presents yet another task to be completed in an already cluttered workload.

The form of adult education, as outlined by Tobias (1996) with respect to New Zealand, is generally transferable to other Western-based systems wherein adults are assumed to have undertaken post-compulsory education of some kind. Tobias refers to an adult and community education field which includes adult basic education, second chance education, personal development, cultural education and education for group and community development. While the general profile of the field in Scotland follows a similar pattern (hardly surprising since New Zealand was colonised by the British), the “older institutions” such as the Workers’ Education Association (WEA) have a stronger hold and the ethos of community development is more prominent. Providers of adult and community education such as DACE endeavour to work in partnership with local bodies to help address inequalities consistent with a social justice ethic

The RAE steps in

The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), repeated every few years, seeks to encapsulate the

scope of research conducted in British universities and provide data for the distribution of funding through Funding Councils.⁶ First conducted in 1986 as the Research Selectivity Exercise “it has always been managed by the agencies responsible for providing the core funds for research and teaching in the UK” (Adams & Smith, 2006: 36). Subjects/disciplines are considered “units of assessment” (UoAs) and placed together with ostensibly similar UoAs into panels. Each panel has a group of expert reviewers constructed from academia to make judgments on colleagues’ research outputs. For 2008 Education is the Unit of Assessment 45; Adult Education is part of this wider Education rubric. In the previous RAE of 2001, members of DACE performed moderately well in a new faculty. Against trends elsewhere in the UK, DACE in Glasgow withstood the temptation by universities to convert adult education into a cash cow (Knapper & Cropley, 2000). Anecdotally, faculty colleagues believe that the research reputation and performance prevented a move to dismember the department.

Academic were considered “returnable” or “research active” when they could produce four pieces of work worthy of inclusion over the period 2001–2007. The criteria for judgment were originality, significance and rigour. In University supplied notes to guide this decision-making process for UoA 45, originality is described as “a characteristic of research which is not merely a replication of other work or simply applies well-used methods to straightforward problems”; significance occurs if research “breaks new theoretical or methodological ground, provides new social science knowledge or tackles important practical current problems and provides trustworthy results in some field of education”; rigour “can helpfully be associated with methodological and theoretical robustness and the use of a systematic approach. It includes traditional qualities such as reliability and validity, and also qualities such as integrity, consistency of argument and consideration of ethical issues”. The merit of each submitted piece was graded on a 0–4 scale: 0 as falling below the standard; 1 as “nationally recognised”; 2 as “recognised internationally”; 3 as “internationally excellent”; 4 as “world-leading”, at the cutting edge of international quality.

In an evaluation of the RAE, Adams and Smith (2006) point to numerous issues with the above approach. Words such as “quality”, “excellence”, “international” and “robustness” inevitably involve subjective judgment and this subjectivity can change dependent on who is making the judgment. Hence, who gets to read the actual individual pieces and make recommendations to the next level above can heavily influence the outcome. One of the publicised differences between the RAE and the PBRF is that while the PBRF assesses the individual as the main unit of analysis, the RAE focuses on the departmental/faculty level (Codd, 2006). Hence, individual performance is purportedly “hidden” in the overall assessment.

My own role in this exercise within the Faculty of Education was as a “research champion” for the field of adult education. Along with another more established professor (who has left DACE but is still considered “returnable” for the RAE) and a “new researcher” within DACE (whom I chose so that she could gain experience of this process and strengthen her own research profile) our “theme” team were charged with assessing the outputs of colleagues in adult education. The overall responsibility for facilitating this assessment process fell to the Deputy Dean who had overview of the four areas of strength emphasised in our faculty’s RAE return. The agreed areas at the point of my departure were: adult education; higher education (including teacher education); curriculum, policy and innovation (3–18); critical and cultural perspectives.

Such areas were not set in concrete; indeed, there was considerable overlap across the themes, but it was important not to have areas so tight that they excluded some research.

It is interesting to consider the 2008 RAE process in the context of the overall development of research culture(s) in the faculty. The previous exercise, conducted shortly after the merger described above, resulted in a very modest return, with just over 20 staff included. In the current RAE exercise, the faculty is looking to 50–60 entries. This growth over seven years is considerable – whatever else the RAE may be criticised for, it has helped significantly to increase the outputs of staff. It is doubtful, in my view, that without this external pressure, that the level of output would have been as high. But we need to also ask, “At what cost to other activities and to communities?” These points (growth of different kinds of research; the consequential impact on other academic functions) are echoed in the voices of critics with regard to both the PBRF and the RAE. For instance, Higgins (2005) identifies three problematic areas:

- within the subject Education, the increased output brings with it increased variation as to what might count as research;
- the substantial variation in orientation of researchers, given the multi-disciplinary base of Education; and
- the issue of appropriate criteria for judgment.

With regard to what gets counted, she alerts us to favouritism for traditional forms of outputs in journal articles, books and book chapters over more applied research outputs. I can confirm that in the exercise in which I was engaged with departmental and faculty colleagues, reports to outside agencies were definitely less preferred to journal articles in the “best” peer-reviewed journals. In the position of adult education, this was indeed troublesome, given that even the best of adult-education journals were not seen as very prestigious. Even books, in some cases written for a practitioner readership, were not as highly rated as journal articles despite claims in official communications that theoretical and applied outputs had parity of esteem.

Within DACE there is a Research Strategy Committee, which meets regularly, as the name suggests, to consider ways to cultivate a research community, to establish DACE research priorities and to carry out both individual and collective activity. For instance, a seminar series of invited guests over a wide range of adult education interests emerges from this group. Alongside this departmental research group there is a corresponding Faculty Research Committee which undertakes a similar role at a faculty-wide level and into which the departmental group feeds and takes back information on a reciprocal basis. As Chair of the DACE Research Committee, I participated in the wider Faculty group. In addition, as HoD I was able to see more holistically how the research strategies complement or contradict other academic responsibilities. As a relatively new HoD, I valued the insights gained from being an active member of the research agenda and could convey to colleagues in DACE emerging trends and issues to be addressed. On the other hand, as I liked to operate from a democratic decision-making base where possible, I understood that I potentially held on to quite a lot of power as a prominent player in the RAE and as HoD. Given my departure and the recent appointment of a new director for CRADALL, the responsibility for sustaining a research culture is in new hands.

In the opening section of this paper, the notion of control from above and managerial authority is emphasised. While not disputing that this is undoubtedly the case by the hierarchical structure established with the University to present Glasgow's position in the best light, the process of the RAE, from my perspective, was handled within the Department and Faculty in a humanistic manner. In contrast to what was perceived as a rather punishing regime in the 2001 round, the Deputy Dean has facilitated a process where the four RAE teams have kept staff informed at every stage, sought feedback on processes and endeavoured to make the process as participatory as possible. However, staff have been aware of the importance of this largely bureaucratic procedure and realise the outcomes may be less than positive if they do not perform. Contrary to the message conveyed in literature (e.g. Codd, 2005) regarding the less individualised character of the RAE (as opposed to the PBRF), all academics in DACE knew the importance of their inclusion in relation to future careers. Individual academics were interviewed by the Deputy Dean in terms of the process itself and given clear expectations of what was required. Hence, in terms of impact on individual academic identity, I suggest, the distinction between the two assessments is over-rated.

One of the negative aspects of the process for DACE was that several staff, who are subject specialists, such as biologists, have their returns go to an alternative faculty, assuming there was one that was appropriate. Some of these staff had positive outcomes in terms of returnability in another faculty (whose norms for acceptance may well be higher than those of the Faculty of Education). Others did not meet the standards of the other faculty; and a couple did not have a clear discipline in which they could be returned. The career impact for those in this category of "not accepted", either because their items were considered "not good enough" or because of incongruities in the processes of another faculty, will remain uncertain. However, this same uncertainty exists for those in DACE and the Faculty of Education generally who were not "returned" for other reasons. Whether there are specific consequences for not being included remains cloudy. There has been talk in several universities of changing non-returnable staff from University Lecturer to University Teacher contracts, with some loss of status for the individual. The issue of the effect of the RAE on academic identity and career is prevalent in the literature. Morton and Gordon (2005), for example, challenge the value of research outputs which do not contribute to improved educational practice; they pinpoint the devaluing of practitioner research in favour of more traditional forms of research as a negative consequence of exercises such as the RAE and PBRF. They cite the encouragement for academics to publish in highly valued peer-reviewed journals as antithetical to supporting more immediate communities of interest.

As stated previously, the judgments for acceptability into the RAE are based on the four best outputs of an academic over the six-year period (2001–2007). On the face of it, such a return should not prove problematic for seriously-engaged academics (as one should publish whether or not the RAE existed). However, sub-disciplines and domains within an already-marginalised field such as adult education have their own orientations and priorities which may not accord with research. If staff do publish regularly, it may be better in terms of readership and impact on practice to write for community-focussed groups who would view academic research enterprise with suspicion. Indeed, for DACE staff involved in community learning and development, the history has been one of community action for change where publishing in peer-reviewed journals read by other academics is not seen as a high priority. Nonetheless,

being located within a University context brings with it particular responsibilities of which writing and publishing is one basic expectation. At a concrete level, I know of a staff member unable to return publications in the practice-oriented journal, *Concept*, because it does not meet the specific criteria for acceptability. This dilemma for academic staff with a more community-focussed agenda is prevalent for a marginalised field such as adult education. Middleton (2006) discusses the impact of the PBRF on Education – her remarks are especially salient for adult educators in a university setting in relation to the RAE. The identity as “researcher” is not primary and nor is the individual perceived as the fundamental unit for analysis, given that in applied areas (such as adult education), the collective efforts of researchers, practitioners and policy-makers are highly valued. Middleton further argues that “the other half” of academics, its professional dimension, is devalued and excluded through the over-emphasis on surveillance and judgments on outputs.

The criteria for inclusion were rigour, originality and impact/significance. While guidance was provided on what constitutes “rigour” for instance (see above), there is clearly room for disagreement in an individual case whether this criterion has been met. As a team of readers, we independently graded colleagues’ work on a 0–4 scale, the score of zero indicating that the piece was not worthy of inclusion. A score of four meant that the piece should be seen as internationally very significant (not to be confused with an article written for an international readership which may be otherwise less meritorious). The distinct tendency was for a cluster effect to occur around the 2–3 grade; we were not keen to discredit work by giving it either a 0 or 1 as an average of over 2 for the four pieces would normally be required to make a person’s work returnable. Other issues encroached on judgment. Did it matter whether the article appeared in a top journal? Could it be “good enough” if returned in a relatively minor publishing house? Is a book equivalent to a peer reviewed article? How could the significance of an article be adequately demonstrated? Is it only by citation? These and other vexed questions came to the fore and necessitated on-going debate.

In addition to the research committees at departmental and faculty levels, a special RAE series of meetings were organised at both levels. I met regularly with my two other “adult-education” colleagues; similarly, there were frequent meetings of the RAE Sub-group at faculty level to help sort through questions of the type above. In latter times, the preoccupation was with the construction of text-boxes where authors demonstrate the criteria of rigour, originality and significance of an item in fewer than 150 words. In addition, staff who were notified of their probable inclusion in the Education RAE return (ultimately the decision was made “upstairs” in the light of the principle of University-wide submission) put forward “esteem indicators” to be included as part of the narrative of the faculty. Esteem indicators included: office holding in learned societies and key national/international bodies; editorship and membership of peer reviewed journals; academic and professional consultancy; reviewers for research councils; keynote addresses at (international) conferences; awards; doctoral external examining. Judgments in this area of esteem were difficult to make and tended to move in the direction of more hardened academically-sound measures such as editorship of a high-profile journal, or part of an international panel rather than as an adviser to a local council or a valued community participant in a leadership programme. Of course, the more experienced researchers could call upon more instances of esteem, thus confirming what Codd (2005)

called “the Matthew effect” – the RAE exercise itself acerbates the differences between the research rich and poor.

So how has the RAE impacted on research culture? Immediately, even asking this question presupposes that establishing a vibrant research culture is of high importance, a position that most but not all colleagues would agree with. Overall, though, has the RAE been a positive or negative force and for whom? In my mind, it has heightened the importance of research as a (or “the”) primary function of a “good academic”. (In effect, by comparison, it has officially rendered teaching as a secondary area of importance for academics.) It has called into question what constitutes research and the criteria used for the RAE exercise have attempted to answer that question though not to everyone’s satisfaction. The level of published output is highly likely to have been lower if the RAE (or something similar) did not exist, so clearly most people would perceive that as a positive outcome. On the other hand, as identified by Adams and Smith (2006), the type of publication assumes more importance; a move away from conference proceedings and monographs towards peer-reviewed journals, arguably producing a smaller readership and less immediate application to real-life issues in education.

The RAE has quickened the pace of academic life in general as the other academic duties to be performed (teaching, administration, community service) are not reduced. Hence, for many, it has increased workload or arguably distorted it in a particular (perhaps unwanted) direction. In addition, there is undoubtedly a move in academia at large to value more highly research which has economic benefits, especially that funded by research councils or other high profile research-sponsoring bodies. While some staff adjust to this kind of entrepreneurial imperative, others feel disinclined to engage explicitly in such financially-driven endeavours. In my opinion, there is a need to get the two areas of theoretically rigorous work without direct concrete applications, and funded, applied research, closer together with value perceived in both kinds of research activity. We need to avoid the bifurcation of educational research identified by Smith (2005) and Middleton (2006).

The relationship of research with teaching remains problematic, especially for some academics. As Hattie (2005) points out, the conditions of work for academics may have changed and their identities as teachers/researchers altered. More research pressure may result in less time for the planning and implementation of effective teaching; it may displace some preparatory work for teaching or may be an additive to it (Findsen, 2004). Yet some may argue that research-inspired teaching is the apex of the teacher-student interchange; the RAE may have provided some academics with new insights which can be shared with students through teaching and/or research supervision.

As a HoD, I felt my engagement with the RAE to be largely positive. At times at a personal level the sheer administration of who had produced what was daunting and painstaking, taking me away from actual research. Talking about research in committees is seldom a substitute for actually doing it. However, the overview of DACE staff’s outputs placed me in a more informed position, especially in terms of which staff members need most support to achieve their research goals either individually or as part of a sub-group. It also placed me in a more powerful position where the exercise of ethical responsibility was imperative.

Research in adult education and likely impact

The research items produced in adult education included a wide range of topics and methods: historical interpretations of social movements; participation studies; adult literacy research; philosophical debates on key concepts; writes-up of European-based comparative studies; analyses of poverty reduction adult education programmes; analyses of non-formal learning contexts for older adults. In short, both theoretical work and empirical studies of varying types have found acceptance, attesting to the breadth of DACE's work. Inside the University, there have been comments that the diversity and complexity of the DACE research endeavour has been well displayed.

In judging the impact of the RAE, it is possible to make observations at varying levels, both internal and external. The jury will be out for some time on the likely longer-term effects for both individuals and DACE. Most of my colleagues have taken a serious view of the process and complied with the numerous e-mails and meetings related to the process with equanimity. A few have offered mild resistance on the basis that we are "playing a game" and that there is likely to be minimal difference to their work lives. The culture of collegiality in DACE remains; for the moment the RAE has not directly diminished the co-operative ethos characteristic of this department.

I believe the RAE to have few effects on the local adult education field. It matters little to people in a community learning centre whether academics are strengthening their research profiles. If the RAE has led to research on practice, with community participants as co-researchers, a position valued by participatory researchers (see Park, 1993), then the outcomes for communities may be more tangible. However, as this type of research is time consuming and less likely to be submitted to peer-reviewed journals, it is likely that these benefits are more theoretical than actual. This cascade effect may result in positive benefits but they would be difficult to observe and no cause-effect relationship between teaching (inspired by research) and improved practice would be discernible.

Concluding comments

This paper has endeavoured to describe and analyse the RAE in the particular context of DACE and the Faculty of Education at the University of Glasgow from the perspective of an active participant in the process and as a HoD with responsibility for the enhancement of adult education at this university. My own position as both a RAE champion and HoD of DACE enabled me to detect both positive and negative effects on individual academics. As DACE was already a "good player" in research terms, the RAE has not impacted too negatively on individuals' work though it clearly complicated their work patterns. While most perceive it as a necessary evil, a few previously low on returnable items have actively sought to meet the essential criteria for inclusion in order to consolidate their careers. It is too early to make judgments of longer-term consequences for academics not included. Neither is it straightforward to judge the current and future impact on the wider field of adult education practice though realists would probably argue for minimal impact.

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Notes

1. I was a member of staff in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Glasgow, from 1 April 2004 until 21 March 2008. This paper is a retrospective portrayal of my involvement in the RAE exercise in the latter part of this period.

2. The boundaries of Glasgow city seem to be porous. In a limited sense, Glasgow has a population of around 700,000, however, in Greater Glasgow there are over two million people; the majority of Scots live in the geographical and commercial band from Glasgow to Edinburgh. Potentially, this provides a secure intake of adult students outside the traditional recruits of high school leavers.
3. In this respect, DACE is a very important vehicle for this elite institution to widen its access; DACE takes in the majority of the University's mature-age students through the above Open and Cert HE Programmes.
4. The international trend, which DACE has managed to buck, is to restructure departments/centres for continuing education in universities into economically self-sustaining units to provide programmes for adults and to retain academics in adult education, in Schools of Education, if at all.
5. DACE has around 50 permanent staff, just under half of whom are academics and several of whom are from subject specialisms (e.g. psychology, philosophy, history, biology, art, physics/astronomy). As an academic department, DACE is atypical as it has a considerable administrative load associated with a very large liberal adult education programme.
6. In Scotland the funding body responsible for distribution of research funds will be the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) formed by the recent merger of the previous Scottish Higher Education Funding Council and the Further Education Funding Council.