

**Supplementary memorandum to the House of Commons Science
& Technology Committee's Inquiry into the
Research Assessment Exercise**

1. During the evidence session on 23 January, 2002, two issues arose on which SBS would like to submit further evidence to the Committee.

Balance between Science and Art

1. Dr Iddon raised the issue of whether there has been a shift away from science and engineering research, and towards arts and humanities research, as a result of the RAE.

2. Using figures on the number of University Departments entering the exercise, Dr Iddon demonstrated a decline in entries in chemistry and materials science. This was explained by the HEFCE representatives partly as a result of mergers and closures, and was attributed to "better management" of research.

3. The implication was that the decline was a broadly positive result of the RAE, because more money and more people were migrating towards well-managed, excellent departments.

4. The table below sets out the number of *people* entered in three science and engineering subjects, and three arts and humanities subjects in the last two research assessment exercises (rounded to the nearest full-time equivalent).

5. It is perfectly clear that the decline in the number of people (not departments) entered into the exercise has hit the sciences and engineering disproportionately hard. It is not true that the changes Dr Iddon asked about can be attributed entirely to mergers, closures and better management – there really were fewer chemists, biologists and electronic engineers submitted to the exercise in 2001 than there were in 1996.

	Number of full time equivalent research staff		
Subject	1996 RAE	2001 RAE	% change
Chemistry	1369	1300	Fall of 5%
Biological Sciences	2501	2417	Fall of 3%
Electrical & Electronic Engineering	1203	863	Fall of 28%
English Language & Literature	1418	1520	Rise of 7%
History	1379	1720	Rise of 25%
Music	421	487	Rise of 15%

6. However, the better management that has led to this does not seem to have applied to English, History and Music, in each of which there has been a rise in the number of people. Since these subjects are managed by the same Vice Chancellors as the science departments, the argument about better management cannot possibly fully explain the phenomenon that Dr Iddon was seeking to examine.

7. On these figures, it appears that Dr Iddon was unquestionably correct that there has been a relative drift towards the arts and humanities, and away from the sciences.

8. One possible explanation is that the subject differentials referred to during the evidence session are not correctly balanced, so that while humanities subjects receive something like the true cost of their research, the sciences do not. Such a situation could lead to a reduction in sciences while allowing the arts and humanities to retain their volume. This possible explanation deserves further investigation.

Long term research

9. When Dr Iddon raised the subject of long-term research, which does not necessarily produce instantly publishable results, he was told that to produce four scientific papers in five years was not a “publish or perish” regime.

10. However, the HEFCE admitted that because of strong representations from those in the humanities, regarding the nature of their research, the expectation is that researchers in these areas will produce four papers every seven years.

11. SBS believes that it is utterly perverse to say that **all** research scientists work in ways that should lead to four outcomes, while **all** of those in the arts and humanities work in ways that cannot do so. We have no argument with those in the humanities who rightly argue that their working methods do not lend themselves to rapid publication, but we remain convinced that Dr Iddon was absolutely correct in his assertion that this is also true of some scientists.

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