

# HEFCE'S consultation on allocation method for postgraduate research funding from 2012-13. Response 20 June 2011

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## 1a

Do you agree that for 2012-13 we should increase the value of the RDP supervision fund, by up to £35 million?

## Yes

### 1b

Any comments

The Association of Business Schools ([www.the-abs.org.uk](http://www.the-abs.org.uk)) which represents a network of 119 business schools as full members in the UK welcomes an increase in research degree programme supervision funding. The HEFCE consultation document suggests, however, that additional funding will be sourced by a redistribution of 2\* funding.

## 2a

Which of the options we have described for linking the allocation of RDP supervision funding to quality (a threshold, or a quality weighting) best meets our aim of encouraging the supervision of students in higher-quality research environments?

## A quality weighting

### 2b

Why?

A quality weighting appears feasible while the threshold option lacks sufficient details. The RAE quality profile is broadly accepted by the higher education community as a robust measure of research quality, unlike the possible alternative of a 'threshold' of some kind. The quality profile approach, however, only refers to 3\* and 4\*; a mix of both, where both quantity and quality come into play, would perhaps better serve a broader range of UK business schools. It may be argued, however, that funding should be allocated to institutions where there is significant doctoral output, e.g. for DBAs, not only to training centres.

## 3a

If we used a quality score, as described in paragraph 22, to achieve differentiation by quality, does a ratio of 1:2 seem appropriate?

## Yes

### 3b

Any comments

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## 4a

Do you consider that the value of an institution's RDP grant relative to its mainstream QR grant provides a useful indicator of the sustainability of postgraduate supervisory activity at whole-institution level?

## No

## 4b

### Any comments

The Association of Business Schools is the authoritative voice of business and management education in and for the UK. As institutions are diverse in their research activity profiles, the relative volumes of QR and RDP funding may vary between them.

Clearly, if an institution has a strong quality 3\* and 4\* rating but relatively fewer PGR students compared to its peers, there is scope to grow PGR supervision capacity.

The consequences of supporting only 3\* and 4\* in HEFCE's mainstream quality research (QR) funding will result in the research degree supervision (RDS) programme being mapped on to this. This will result in an ever increasing concentration of HEFCE funding for both research and doctoral training in a small number of institutions that satisfy the RAE/REF quality levels. This may lead to the UK being out of line with other countries that are aiming to increase and broaden their national research base and to enhance the postgraduate research student experience throughout their higher education systems. High quality support for a small number of doctoral students can make a positive contribution to doctoral education. UK business schools compete globally for doctoral students and doctorally qualified faculty in a highly competitive market. The Economist (11 June 2011) suggests there are 13,000 business schools world-wide. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2007 stated that almost a quarter of students studying internationally opted for business studies. In the UK, PGR numbers are 4,751 FTE for Business and Administrative Studies (HESA 2009/10). Business and management represents 1 in 20 of PGR FTE, 1 in 4 PGT FTE and 1 in 5 of postgraduate FTE (PGT and PGR). If RDR is concentrated only in a small number of institutions, no matter how good they are, this approach could substantially reduce the base of the next generation of researchers in the UK which will seriously undermine the UK's knowledge based economy. Concentration potentially jeopardizes the PhD pipeline to support the UK's business school community in the future. This is in contrast with what is happening in other highly developed and emerging countries where the research and research training base is increasing. AACSB International represents business schools in the US and it, too, is concerned about the faculty pipeline and sustaining scholarship in business schools (<http://www.aacsb.edu/publications/dfc/DFC-ES-final.pdf>).

The HEFCE consultation document refers to a 'high quality research environment', however, with the option for funding based on the RAE, it should not be forgotten that in the RAE profiles research environment made up only 20% (research funding, PhD completions, research culture, etc.), with 70% publications. In other words, if the allocation of postgraduate research funding from 2012-13 is based on the RAE profile, the way HEFCE assesses worthiness of RDR funding is heavily based on publications and only little weight is given to PhD completions, research culture, etc. This would mean that an institution which has a number of researchers that published a number of 'blockbusters' would receive a high share and those where there is a good base of 2\* and some 3\*/4\* but have good completion rates and good research culture would receive little. The question is then, would a PhD student receive better supervision at the former or latter?

Finally, it is important to require that Postgraduate Codes of Practice operate within institutions to ensure that high quality research supervision is being provided to all research students. Such a Code of Practice should also require, for example, that all research students are supervised by academic faculty members who are undertaking high quality research.