

In August 2008 guidance was issued to institutions by HESA in relation to the RAE as follows:

All staff who were eligible for submission in the RAE, whether submitted or not, must be assigned to a Unit of Assessment in the HESA staff return. A question has arisen over the definition of eligibility. I have asked HEFCE (as UK-wide RAE manager) to provide further clarification of the position. It is as follows. HEFCE has confirmed that the interpretation of the RAE guidance published in the HESA manual is correct and that all staff meeting the definitions of Category A and C for the 2008 RAE should be returned. Details of the coverage of categories A and C can be found in RAE 03/2005 paragraphs 76 to 90. All staff meeting the definitions contained in these paragraphs should be returned using either code 1 or code 2, reflecting whether or not they were selected for assessment. Category A and C includes staff employed on a teaching-only basis. The funding councils will be using the data from this field for equal opportunities monitoring.

The definition of eligibility in the Glossary in RAE 03/2005 suggests a much narrower interpretation of eligibility inconsistent with the above. It reads as follows.

Academic staff whose primary employment function is research, teaching or both and who can be shown to have undertaken significant autonomous research, or otherwise to have made a significant independent research contribution to the research output of a unit or department.

It is HESA's understanding that this was intended as a description of the profile of staff actually expected to be submitted, but it reads as a definition of eligibility for submission, which it is not. The confusion is compounded because, although the main document uses the word 'eligible' freely, it is defined only implicitly, rather than explicitly, in paragraphs 76 to 90, making it natural to turn to the Glossary for clarification.

At a later stage (October 2008), while collection of the record was in progress, HEFCE (as UK RAE managers) accepted that it was 'not unreasonable' for an institution to have selected staff for inclusion in the RAE on the basis of the eligibility definition in the Glossary, and a significant number of institutions indicated that they did indeed follow that procedure. Others will have treated a broader group of staff as being eligible, in line with the instructions in Paragraphs 76 to 90. At the time when staff were selected for inclusion in RAE submissions, an institution is unlikely to have assigned to a Unit of Assessment any member of staff deemed to be ineligible according to the definition applied in that institution. This will have created a significant inconsistency across institutions that removes any consistent basis for data collection.

In the light of this, the funding bodies have agreed that HESA should remove the two relevant fields in the staff record (RESACT and UOA) from the databases that HESA supplies to them on completion of the collection process. However HEFCE advised that institutions should retain all relevant records.

HESA subsequently advised institutions of the following actions:

1. Institutions could choose to resubmit their data setting Person.RESACT and Person.UOA to X and XXX respectively for all records.
2. There was no requirement to change first-stage validation since a submission of X and XXX is a valid combination here.
3. Two relevant COMMIT-stage validation rules were removed:
7025049 - Where INSTID and STAFFID exists in lookup file, the first two digits of this field (UOA), if valid, should match that of the UOA field contained in the lookup file.
7025052 - If the INSTID, STAFFID, UOA combination matches that in the HEFCE lookup file, RESACT must be '1' or '2'.

4. The UOA_RAE sheet was removed from the C07025 checkdoc.
5. Whether or not institutions chose to default their data, in delivering unprocessed data files to Statutory Customers HESA replaced the data in these fields with X's.
6. Further, HESA removed completely Person.RESACT and Person.UOA from the delivery of processed data to Statutory Customers.
7. In addition, Person.RESACT and Person.UOA were removed from the main HESA dataset and written to a separate table which would not be routinely accessible to internal staff for analysis.

As a result of the above circumstances, a plan agreed by the HESA Board for HESA to publish contextual information on the FTE of staff assigned to each Unit of Assessment at the time of the publication of RAE profiles in December 2008 could not be implemented. Further to that, HESA took the decision not to make any use of data that had been collected within the Person.RESACT or Person.UOA fields.

Interest in contextual RAE information at the time of publication of the RAE profiles remained strong however, especially within the media. There were considerable efforts among data users to identify alternative means for estimating populations of staff who had been eligible to be submitted to the RAE 2008. HESA provided the following statement to all parties requesting contextual data:

HESA holds no data specifying which or how many staff have been regarded by each institution as eligible for inclusion in RAE 2008, and no data on the assignment to Units of Assessment of those eligible staff not included. Further, the data that HESA does hold is not an adequate alternative basis on which to estimate eligible staff numbers, whether for an institution as a whole, or disaggregated by Units of Assessment, or by some broader subject-based grouping.

Indicators of the scale of activity of an institution, or of areas within it, may be of interest for comparison with RAE material, but where they are based on HESA data they can serve neither as a direct estimate of eligible staff numbers nor as a proxy proportional to such numbers.

Any parties requesting unpublished data on staff FTEs by HE institution for purposes of publishing alongside analysis of the RAE 2008 profiles were placed under contract. A contractual condition stipulated that the above statement must be published in conjunction with their analysis.

HESA
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