



Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education

Vol. 3, No. 1.

ISSN: 1473-8376

[www.hlst.ltsn.ac.uk/johlste](http://www.hlst.ltsn.ac.uk/johlste)

PERSPECTIVE

## **Extracts from the ATHE Response to the Consultation Document ‘RAE 02/2004: Panel Configuration and Recruitment’ for the UK Research Assessment Exercise 2008**

**John Tribe ([john.tribe@bcuc.ac.uk](mailto:john.tribe@bcuc.ac.uk))**

Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College  
Kingshill Road, High Wycombe, HP13 5BB, UK.

**DOI:10.3794/johlste.31.per**

**© Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education**

In March 2004, the higher education funding councils for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland published their proposals for the Units of Assessment and panel configuration for the Research Assessment Exercise in 2008 (<http://www.rae.ac.uk/pubs/2004/02>). This Perspective summarises the Association for Tourism in Higher Education’s response to the consultation on these proposals.

The Association for Tourism in Higher Education (ATHE) (formerly The National Liaison Group for Tourism - NLG) is the subject association for Tourism in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK. Its membership of approximately 40 HEIs enables it to speak with authority on behalf of this sector. This response is based on a consultative exercise conducted by the ATHE with its members.

The ATHE wishes to register a strong protest about the invisibility of Tourism Studies in the proposed Units of Assessment (UoAs) for RAE 2008. It contests the claim that RAE 2008 will ‘recognise excellence ... in new disciplines and in fields crossing traditional disciplinary boundaries’ (<http://www.rae.ac.uk/news/>). For indeed, tourism studies seems to represent the epitome of a new field and one that crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries and yet is ill-served by the proposed UoA structure for RAE 2008. It therefore urges the funding councils to reconsider the current titles of UoAs and ensure that Tourism Studies is given the prominence it deserves. This would be a separate UoA under main panel H. It is felt that panel H represents the kind of multidisciplinary approach that typifies tourism studies. The ATHE believes there is compelling evidence to support such a move. This evidence is set out below:

1. Tourism research has reached a size of maturity, substance and importance in UK Higher Education.

---

*John Tribe is Professor of Tourism, Head of Research and Director of the Leisure and Tourism Education Research Centre (LaTERC) in the Faculty of Leisure and Tourism at Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, UK. He is Chair of the Association of Tourism in Higher Education (ATHE).*

- 1.1. A significant number of outputs submitted under RAE 2001 came under the area of Tourism Studies. Taking only the most popular 7 UoAs, Botterill and Haven (2003) identified 363 tourism outputs by 146 staff.
- 1.2. Taking account of all the UoAs, for both tourism and hospitality, around 500 outputs were submitted, equivalent to around 144 active researchers (Page, 2003).
- 1.3. There was at least one tourism-related output in no less than 31 of the total of 69 UoAs in RAE 2001 (Tribe, 2003).
- 1.4. The term 'tourist/ism' was present in the title of a research output in no less than 92 higher education institutions in the UK (Tribe, 2003).
- 1.5. The Business and Management Panel of RAE 2001 stated that 'The discipline base of tourism has resulted in a relatively mature body of work, with around 20 per cent of international quality' (Source: Overview Report from UoA43: Business and Management Studies, available from <http://www.hero.ac.uk/rae/overview/docs/UoA43.doc>).
- 1.6. There are currently approximately 90 tourism doctoral students. Indeed, Botterill et al. (2002: 293) found 'a substantive and expanding volume of doctoral studies related to tourism in UK universities' and discovered a total of 149 tourism doctoral theses submitted between 1990 and 1999.
- 1.7. There are approximately 50 professors in the area of Tourism Studies in the UK.
- 1.8. Tourism Studies is well established internationally. There are in excess of 37 journals which publish more than 500 research articles each year. These include the influential and highly respected *Annals of Tourism Research* and *Journal of Travel Research*.
- 1.9. Tourism research is increasing in the UK.
2. Tourism is an important and established subject of study within UK HEIs. Tourism programmes require a thriving research environment to support the development of knowledge in this area.
  - 2.1. There are currently approximately 10,500 undergraduate and 700 postgraduate students.
  - 2.2. There were 9738 UCAS applications under the JACS subject line N8 for Tourism, Transport and Travel as of March 2004.
  - 2.3. In 2003/04 there were 56 HEIs offering undergraduate Tourism programmes (Stuart-Hoyle, 2004).
3. On the basis of the data supplied in paragraphs 1 and 2, the ATHE believes that a case is made for a separate UoA in absolute terms. However, it wishes also to note that in comparative terms it would raise questions of injustice and inequity if Tourism Studies were not to earn its own UoA in the face of what appear to be less significant areas of research which have retained separate UoAs (e.g. Celtic Studies and Italian).
4. Other HE classifications now identify tourism as a distinct category (e.g. the Learning and Teaching Support Network supports a separate cluster of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism, the QAA identifies a similar cluster of subjects and JACS codes identify tourism separately as a second level classification).
5. Tourism is a significant activity in the UK economy and society.
  - 5.1. It '... is one of the largest industries in the UK (the fifth largest in England), worth £74 billion to the UK economy in 2001, about 4.5% of the GDP. It is a major employer in the UK: 2.1 million people have jobs in this sector, which is 7% of the UK workforce. Some 10% of all new jobs created are in the tourism industry, which demonstrates the importance of this growing industry to the UK economy' (Source: The Culture, Media and Sport Committee of the House of Commons: Fourth Report, Jan 2003).
  - 5.2. It is an increasingly important activity in people's lives, shaping identities and communities.
  - 5.3. It is an important source of environmental impacts.
  - 5.4. However, limited tourism research takes place outside of universities. Private sector research is limited in a fragmented industry. The Department of Culture Media and Sport has limited research capacity and Visit Britain (the national tourism organisation) recently abandoned its research and intelligence function.

6. Tourism was virtually invisible in RAE 2001. The whole of the document 'Assessment panels' criteria and working methods' (RAE, 2001) was searched for the word 'tourism'. There was just one occurrence (in a document of 148,397 words) under UoA 34 (Town and Country Planning). This meant that tourism research was spread around a number of UoAs. The lack of a discrete UoA for tourism in RAE 2001 (and the proposed repetition of this for RAE 2008) has (and will continue to) lead to a number of problems:
  - 6.1. Any moves towards a more cohesive tourism field of research will be frustrated. Tourism researchers will be forced to account for the merits of their work not to their immediate peers but to their distant academic cousins in the established disciplines that dominate the UoAs.
  - 6.2. It would appear from the 2001 RAE that it is the discourses of Business and Management and Geography that have gained ascendancy over tourism research. This has vital implications not only for the development of tourism as a separate cognate area, but also for the *practice* of tourism research. In other words, the discourse of the RAE and specifically its structuring of UoA panels and choice of experts for peer review will determine the epistemological development and practice of tourism research. In the RAE, Tourism is not able to speak for itself, but is required to speak through the discourses of (for example) Business and Management and Geography. We may therefore expect the UK tourism research agenda to be largely constituted by understandings offered by Business and Management and Geography. This will surely strengthen a movement noted by Tribe (1997:654) that 'the business world of tourism is pushing out at the expense of other parts [of tourism]'
  - 6.3. Tourism studies is not merely a subset of business studies. It represents a research area rich in complexities and interdisciplinary opportunities.
  - 6.4. There is already much anecdotal evidence that RAE 2008 is having negative consequences for tourism studies. Researchers are being asked to fit their work to business and management studies and are being asked to publish in business and management journals.
  - 6.5. This will have profound implications for the volume and level of manuscripts sent to tourism journals and the development of tourism as a separate cognate area.
  - 6.6. In particular, a notable feature of the development of tourism research has been its maturing from a narrow business focus to a broad multidisciplinary study which better reflects the extraordinary impact the subject has on people and place. The current configuration of RAE 2008 is likely to force the subject back into the narrow confines of business and management with a serious loss of insight into the complexity of the subject. The research base that provides insights and analysis of tourism as a significant economic *and* social *and* cultural activity will be weakened.
  - 6.7. Tourism research was atomised by RAE 2001 where outputs were split across a number of areas so that any critical mass was lost.
  - 6.8. The absence of tourism in past RAEs seems to preclude its presence in the future. There is no advocate of tourism apparent in the planning for RAE 2008. There appears to be no route through which outsiders can enter or influence the established system.
  - 6.9. Tourism research leadership will pass from the UK to our international competitors.
7. Additionally, the ATHE notes a change in focus of UoA 69 (Sports related subjects). Many non-business tourism researchers felt more comfortable submitting under this UoA in 2001 because of its reference to 'leisure' in its panel description. However, it is noted that in the proposals for RAE 2008, Sports related subjects is renumbered UoA 13 and included in panel C. This appears to herald a significant change in the emphasis of this UoA as it now sits with nursing and health subjects and would appear to lose its broader social science appeal. This is likely to further exclude tourism researchers.
8. Finally, it appears to the ATHE that there is a fundamental flaw in the proposals for UoA/Panel constitution for RAE 2008. The previous RAE prided itself on its transparency, an aim which is to be applauded. But it is difficult to locate transparency in the RAE 2008 UoA/Panel proposals. For there do not appear to be published criteria which establish the rules for constituting a UoA. What

are the grounds for inclusion and exclusion? Have the funding councils attempted to gather research of the type offered in paragraph 1 above? The lack of criteria makes an appeal against the proposals difficult. The ATHE believes that it has made a strong case – but it is largely operating in the dark. For without clear criteria it is not possible to ensure that the case for tourism is made most effectively.

## References

- Botterill D., Haven C. and Gale T. (2002) A Survey of Doctoral Theses Accepted by Universities in the UK and Ireland for Studies Related to Tourism, 1990-1999. *Tourist Studies* 2(3), 283-311.
- Botterill, D. and Haven, C. (2003) *Tourism Studies and the Research Assessment Exercise 2001 (Guidelines No. 11)*. Farnham: ATHE.
- Page, S. (2003) Evaluating Research Performance in Tourism: the UK experience. *Tourism Management* 24, 607-622.
- Stuart-Hoyle, M. (2004) *1993-2003 Critical Incidents: Tourism in Higher Education (Guidelines No. 12)*. Farnham: ATHE.
- Tribe, J. (1997) The Indiscipline of Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 24(3), 638-657.
- Tribe, J. (2003) The RAE-ification of Tourism Research in the UK. *International Journal of Tourism Research* 5, 225-234.