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Editorial

John Tribe (john.tribe@bcuc.ac.uk)

Chair of the Editorial Board

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In the UK, the year 2003 has seen the publication of several major policy, consultative and funding documents which are destined to have a significant impact on learning, teaching and research in the Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism (HLST) subjects. These include the White Paper on the Future of Higher Education, the Review of Research Assessment (Roberts Review), consultation on Knowledge Exchanges and the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL).

The last JoHLSTE editorial considered the possible impacts of the White Paper on HLST subjects and it is to the Roberts Review that current attention is turned. Because the constituent subjects of JoHLSTE span the sometime uneasy bedfellows of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism it is sometimes difficult to speak with one voice across this diverse range. It is hoped therefore that readers outside of tourism (and indeed those outside of the UK) will excuse the following analysis that was written with the subject area of tourism in mind. Indeed, it is based on the submission of The Association for Tourism in Higher Education (ATHE) to the Roberts Committee. Most of the issues apply to Hospitality and Leisure. For Sport, the issues are a little different in that not only did it generally score better in the last Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) than Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism subjects, but it has also received research capability funding to encourage research development where RAE scores were lower. Sport research is therefore slightly better embedded in the national research framework than that of Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism, which currently reside precariously on the periphery.

In June 2002 Sir Gareth Roberts was asked to review research assessment on behalf of the UK higher education funding bodies. His consultation report was published in May 2003 and its main recommendations are as follows:

‘We have taken RAE2001 as our starting point and made our recommendations in relation to it. Our principal reforms could be summed up as follows:

- a. the burden of assessment for institutions and assessment panels linked to the amount of funds the institution is competing for
- b. separate assessment of competences such as the development of young researchers
- c. greater transparency, especially in panel selection
- d. greater involvement of non-UK researchers

- e. credible structures to ensure consistency of practice between panels.
- f. flexibility for assessors to develop methods appropriate to their subject
- g. grade bands abolished in favour of a profile of the research strength of each submission, providing for a continuous rating scale
- h. controls on the scores awarded, to prevent grade inflation
- i. a clear link between assessment outcomes and funding
- j. a properly resourced administration.'

(Joint Funding Bodies, 2003:6)

Now, on first reading this seems a fairly agreeable set of recommendations. However a more critical reading of the report, asking the specific question "how will this affect research in tourism?" exposes the less benign features of the report. These may be summarised as follows:

1. The Roberts Review appears to support increased research selectivity. This is understandable in medicine for example, where it would clearly not be sensible to support research at 3 or 4 rated levels given the existence of 5*/6* rated research. But this assumption does not work for emerging areas of research such as tourism where current levels of research excellence rarely exceed 4. This also precludes collaboration with 5*/6* rated research centres.
2. Its approach appears to favour science and technology and well established research in traditional universities. Its scope does not seem to offer support for research in new fields or in new universities.
3. It over concentrates on the large, the powerful and the established at the expense of the new and emerging. A consequence of this is that it does not pay sufficient attention to the consequences of reduced/zero funding for those research groups, networks and communities, such as tourism, which will be adversely affected by its plans.
4. It does not attempt to identify value for money of smaller, emerging research groups. Some kind of cost-benefit analysis would be welcome as a basis for evidence-based policy.
5. Its emphasis is on Research Quality Assessment with some explanation of Research Capability Assessment. There are no proposals for 'the separate approach for the least research intensive institutions' – so the needs of new and emerging areas of research have effectively been ignored.

But is there any reason that tourism research should be encouraged? I believe there are two main reasons that it should. The first is tourism's significance to the economy and the second is that tourism research is emerging and developing, and at a critical stage of its development.

What then is the significance of tourism? First, 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' (The Culture, Media and Sport Committee of the House of Commons, 2003). Second, it is an increasingly important activity in people's lives, shaping identities and communities. Third, it has been overlooked by policymakers as evidenced by the response to the Foot and Mouth crisis where agricultural interests were advanced at the expense of tourism. This, in itself, demonstrates the lack of a research base on the economic impacts of tourism in comparison to agriculture.

What are the special features of tourism research? First, it has demonstrated a rising profile of research quality and outputs over successive RAEs. In 2001, whilst it demonstrated glimmers of 5*

and a limited number of 4 centres, it was mainly rated 3a/3b. This means that although much tourism research is at least of national excellence, it is clearly an emerging and developing area. It should also be noted that tourism research was atomised by the last RAE since it fell between a number of panels and it has suffered a cut in the post-RAE 2001 funding mechanism. Second, tourism research is characterised by small specialist research centres in less research-intensive (and generally 'new') universities. Third, it is flourishing overseas (particularly in Australasia where a number of key UK academics now operate). Indeed, in Australia tourism research attracts significant government funding through the Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism. Fourth, tourism research does not need huge sums of money to support it – a healthy amount of activity developed over the period 1996-2002 with limited funding. However, support for tourism is not yet commensurate with enormous significance of tourism to the economy.

So rather than respond to the point by point recommendation of the Roberts Review let us ask a more direct question: "what does tourism research need to prosper?" The key to this is a funding mechanism that will enable its critical mass to emerge and support its development into a research area of international excellence. I believe that such a funding mechanism needs to address the following four issues:

1. Cohesion: the RAE 2001 meant that tourism research was split across a number of areas so that any critical mass was lost.
2. Visibility: the title 'tourism' was not prominent in the RAE 2001 documentation.
3. Advocacy: there were no experts representing tourism either in the design or the implementation of RAE 2001.
4. Incubation: the special needs of a new and emerging area of research such as tourism are different from those of established areas.

If the new research assessment regime fails to address these issues, research in the UK will ossify around those subject areas that happened to be prominent around the year 2000. New areas such as tourism will be unable to emerge, survive or develop in the highly selective recommendations proposed by Roberts. The consequences of this would include the following:

1. The research base that provides insights and analysis of tourism as a significant economic, social and cultural activity will be weakened.
2. In tourism, the research community is prominent in curriculum development and the production of textbooks – this important link would be threatened.
3. There is a growing cohort of Ph.D. students in tourism (approximately 149 Ph.Ds were awarded 1990-1999). The academics who supervise these students need to be located in, and legitimised by, the wider UK research community. Under current proposals they risk being marginalised.
4. Career aspirations and motivations are highly influenced by research activity, indeed academic identity is often formed by research activity. Innovation, motivation and engagement of UK academics will be dented.
5. Tourism research leadership will pass from the UK to our international competitors.

In summary, tourism research would be less able to fulfil its role in economic, social or academic advancement.

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