

**WORLD'S EDUCATIONAL ISSUES, POLICIES AND
RESEARCH IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
UK PERSPECTIVE (WITH AN ENGLISH SLANT)**

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The focus here will be upon the financing of educational research within the UK leading to an identification of a worrying relative decline in the resource available to educational research. I shall also draw attention to the particular funding dependencies that appear to characterise educational research (as compared to other areas of research within the broad range of social science disciplines). These dependencies may reflect approaches to the operation of educational research that resonate with the situation in other parts of the world. I am drawing from a report produced recently by BERA together with UCET (University Council for the Education of Teachers). The full report can be accessed from the BERA website at <http://www.bera.ac.uk/news/bera-ucet-report>

This report originated with concerns expressed at UCET about developments in the funding and organisation of initial teacher education (ITE) within the UK. These changes have progressively shifted the location of ITE from University Departments of Education (UDEs) to schools with a corresponding loss of income for the UDEs. This funding had both helped to support the research work of academic staff within UDEs and helped to ensure the ongoing development of school-based research and the teaching profession. (It is recognised here, and also in the report, that a concern with school-based educational research is only a part of the overall concern of educational researchers. A considerable amount of significant educational research, in the UK and elsewhere, is not concerned with schools at all – being located in higher education, further education, professional training and lifelong learning.)

These concerns led to a decision by BERA and UCET to establish a joint working group to carry out a wider ranging examination of the present funding of educational research. The working party explored recent changes in a range of different funding streams for educational research and was able to produce comparative data across a number of years and disciplines.

A few highlights are reproduced here but I will first provide a very simple summary of the UK research funding mechanisms.

UK Universities receive funding for core research activities as a grant from central government. These have been increasingly related to assessments of the quality of research both between and within disciplines that are developed through regular Research Assessment Exercises (RAE) which in 2014 becomes the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It is now the case that only those departments who have research work identified as being of the highest standard will receive any of this funding. As a consequence many UK education departments are seeing an increasing division between “research active” and other members of their academic staff. This might further add to separation of research and teaching within Education.

A reduction on this core funding (Quality related -QR- funding) can then also reduce the opportunities that staff have to develop proposals for other forms of research funding which come in the form of competitive bids to the relevant UK Research Councils, similar bodies within the European Union and more responsive bids to the UK government and its various agencies.

Following figures (using the original report’s numbering for reference back) indicate the decline in the total number of education staff submitted to the last three RAEs (Fig 3); the resulting QR allocations across related and comparator disciplines (Fig 5); the

Figure 5. HEFCE QR allocations by social science discipline, 1998-2012 (real terms, 2010/11 as reference)

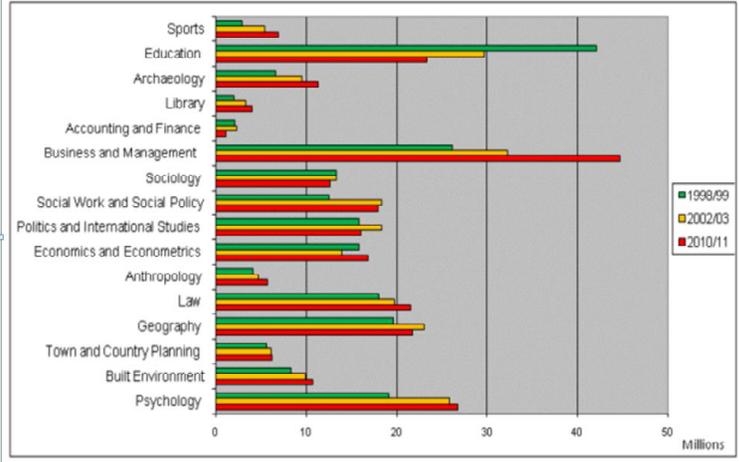


Figure 3. Total FTE research-active staff (in social studies) submitted to the RAE, 1996-2008 (all countries)

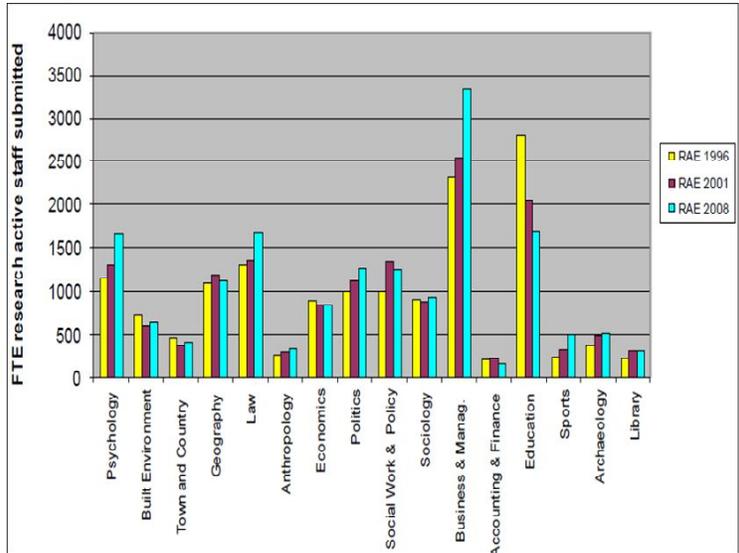
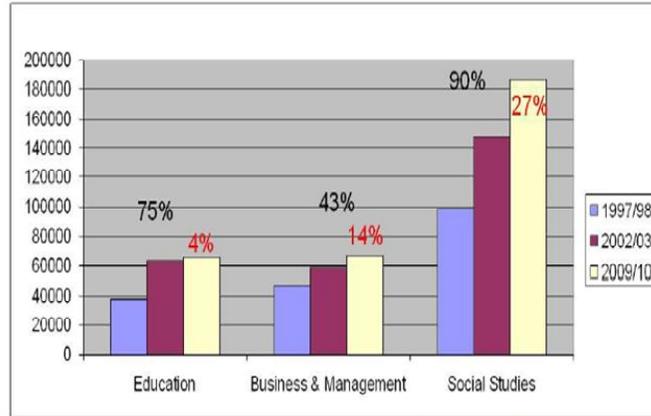
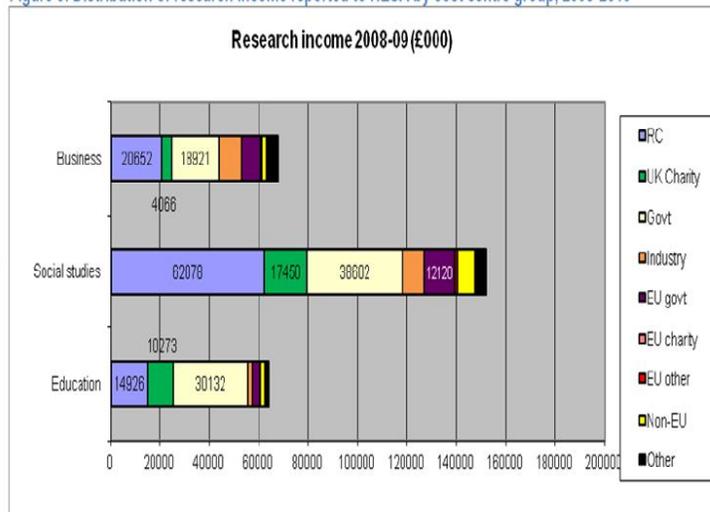


Figure 8. Total research income reported to HESA, by cost group (£000, real terms 2010/11)



Note: black labels indicate % (of 1997) growth 1997-2010; red labels: % growth 2002-2010

Figure 9. Distribution of research income reported to HESA by cost centre group, 2008-2010



overall research income (from all sources) in Education and comparators (Fig 8); and the distribution of research income from various sources in the period 2008-2012 (Fig 9).

The overall picture reveals declines for research funding in education that are greater in many cases than those elsewhere together with a dependency upon government sources for research income. This latter point warrants close attention. It presents, arguably, two different vulnerabilities for educational research. First, the absolute decline in research funding (from directly sponsored government research initiatives and through indirect cuts arising from the termination of important research funders such as Becta – previously the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency) limits opportunities especially at a time of large scale cut backs in state funding of almost all activities. Secondly, and more importantly perhaps in the longer term, education research is likely to be located in a responsive mode reacting to, rather than helping to determine, the government's education agenda. This responsive mode may play a part in judgments of quality that might help to keep British educational research in a low funding situation for the foreseeable future.

This brief paper is based upon a comprehensive review of funding for Educational Research in the UK undertaken by BERA and UCET in 2012. The full report can be accessed at <http://www.bera.ac.uk/news/bera-ucet-report>. Any references made to this paper ought to include a full reference to the BERA/UCET report.