

In the next few months, Denham intends to create “a new framework for higher education”, and his starting point should be a no-holds-barred reconsideration of the nature of scholarship in modern society.

Ernest Boyer, in his thoughtful book *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), published

In the US, there are very strong links between academia and practice, a widespread commitment to engaged scholarship – and no outdated RAE holding scholars back

by the Carnegie Foundation, influenced the trajectory of US higher education and provides a few pointers.

Boyer distinguishes four kinds of scholarship:

- “The scholarship of discovery” comes closest to what is meant when academics speak of “research”. It contributes not only to the stock of human knowledge, but also to the intellectual climate of the university, where the advancement of knowledge can, in Boyer’s view, generate a palpable excitement in the life of an educational institution.

- “The scholarship of integration” gives meaning to isolated facts, putting them in perspective. By making connections across disciplines, placing specialties in their wider context and illuminating data in a revealing way, the scholarship of integration can bring fresh insights to bear on original research.

- “The scholarship of application” asks how knowledge can be responsibly applied to consequential problems, and whether social problems can themselves define an agenda for scholarly investigation.

- “The scholarship of teaching” is concerned with the learning process and the creation of a common ground of intellectual commitment. Great teachers stimulate active, not passive, learning and encourage students to be critical, creative thinkers.

In my role as dean of a college in a large US public university, I learnt quickly that the most respected scholars were the ones who could deliver on all four dimensions of scholarship.

American higher education is far from perfect, but, in my experience, many US universities have a much more rounded view of the nature of modern scholarship.

One consequence is that President Barack Obama is able to appoint young scholars straight into the White House and the upper echelons of government – and they can do the job. This is because there are very strong links between academia and practice in the US, and a widespread commitment to engaged scholarship. Finally, it has to be said, there is no outdated RAE holding scholars back.

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Scholarship is multi-faceted, but the RAE is blind to its richness

Robin Hambleton argues that we need a new vision of academia to replace the myopia of the research assessment exercise

one of the earlier rounds. I also draw on my experience as an academic in the US – a country where there is no such thing as an RAE.

I have argued in these pages before that the exercise distorts academic behaviour, is dominated by vested interests, is embarrassingly subjective and has seriously undervalued those scholars who bridge the worlds of theory and practice (“A very peculiar British practice”, 9 May 2003).

In February 2008, John Denham, the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities

and Skills, noted in a speech that: “This Government spends £6 billion a year on research, yet ministers and officials sometimes find it hard to access academic knowledge tailored to the practical needs of public policy.” This is a national disgrace – all the more so because it is not news.

Six years ago, the National Audit Office report *Getting the Evidence: Using Research in Policy Making* provided a devastating critique of the gulf between UK academics and policymakers. The RAE regime has widened this gap.

Within hours of reading *Times Higher Education’s* report on the financial consequences of the research assessment exercise for 2009-10 (“Reversal of fortunes”, 5 March), vice-chancellors across the land had emailed their faculty, congratulating them on how well they had done in the funding allocation process.

University marketing teams rushed to pluck “evidence” from the results to refresh claims made about the research quality of their scholars, and deans and heads of department polished their soundbites.

These remarks may seem a little tetchy when I reveal that my institution, the University of the West of England, did extremely well in this academic beauty contest. The amount of research funding flowing to us will increase by 121 per cent next year – one of the highest percentage increases of any university in England.

We are proud of this achievement, and I have no wish to belittle it. But the fact that some foxes outwit the hounds does not make the case for foxhunting.

The RAE remains a hopelessly flawed performance evaluation process. I base this view on my experience of the exercise, including serving as a professor in the highest-rated unit of assessment in my field in