

Appendix A



REF Pilot Questionnaire Analysis

Introduction

As part of the JISC project into the ICT implications of the REF bibliometrics pilot study an on-line survey was carried out. The purpose of the survey was twofold:

1. To gain a general overall insight into the approaches of the pilot institutions in meeting the requirements of the pilot.
2. To help identify between four and six potential institutions for more detailed case study.

This document is an initial analysis of the survey results.

Coverage and Response Rate

At the REF Bibliometric Pilot Working Group meeting on the 24th September the pilot institutions were alerted to the existence of the project and the survey was publicised. All institutions were urged to complete the survey and at the same time an initial call for volunteer institutions was made.

The survey was publicised as being available from 24th September until the 5th October. However two institutions indicated that while they were happy to cooperate meeting the 5th October deadline would be difficult and the survey was left open for an additional four days.

In all twenty of the twenty two pilot institutions completed the survey (91% response rate). While some responses were 'terse' all were complete.

A list of the questions in the survey is in Appendix A. The author would like to extend his thanks to David Cornforth of JISC infoNet for his uncomplaining help in developing and administering the on-line elements of the survey and to all institutions who took the time to complete it.

Major Findings

The following sections provide some analysis of the responses to the questionnaire and highlights areas of interest. The author will be happy to answer any further questions that arise. Please note that percentages are rounded to the nearest integer.

Centralised versus Devolved Process

Unsurprisingly all institutions led the process from central support departments. All institutions used data from their central HR systems. Some institutions supplemented their information from local sources and this led to a degree of confusion as institutions had different understandings of 'centralised' and 'devolved'.

Where a central database was used this was classed as 'central'. Where records were collected by central staff and departments/staff simply asked to confirm the correctness this was also classed as central. Where records were collected from individual staff members or departmental systems this was classed as devolved. Using these definitions thirteen institutions (65%) processed their REF data centrally and seven (35%) used a more devolved model.

New/Specific Software

Of the responding institutions three (15%) had developed software specifically to support the REF pilot.

Given that the timescale for the pilot was very short and that the eventual requirements for the REF will probably be different, it was not surprising that seventeen institutions (85%) had not developed any supporting ICT.

This figure also disguised the fact that some of the more sophisticated systems that are in place were sufficiently flexible to manage the REF requirements with relatively slight modifications. This applies to at least two institutions (10%).

Used existing Systems

Of those seventeen institutions which had not developed new software for the pilot, fourteen (82%) had used an existing system. However three (18%) had not used an existing system.

This is somewhat unexpected and implies that the three institutions either did not use any ICT systems to support RAE 2008 or felt that their existing systems were such a bad fit to the REF requirements as to be no use. One of the three indicated that they were in the process of acquiring an ICT system.

New/Amended Processes

Of the sample six of the institutions (30%) had developed new processes to support the information gathering process while fourteen (70%) had not done so.

Of the three institutions which had developed new software, only one had also had to develop new processes.

Two institutions stated that they had not had time to change their processes but intended to do so in the future.

Those institutions that had changed their processes had mainly done so in order to collect information not required by RAE 2008. (At this point several also mentioned the need to expand the information held in corporate HR systems.)

Required Resource

Of the sample six (30%) of institutions replied that supplying the information for the REF Pilot took more effort than they had anticipated. Fourteen (70%) replied it had been about as expected while none replied that it had taken less effort than expected.

Eighteen of the twenty respondents provided estimates of the resource so far expended on the pilot. However these figures need to be treated with great care as the size of the university, the amount of research being carried out and the degree of automation will all affect this figure.

Additionally some respondents gave the figure in FTEs or hours. In order to convert these into days it was assumed that August and September had both comprised twenty working days and that a working day was 7.5 hours in length.

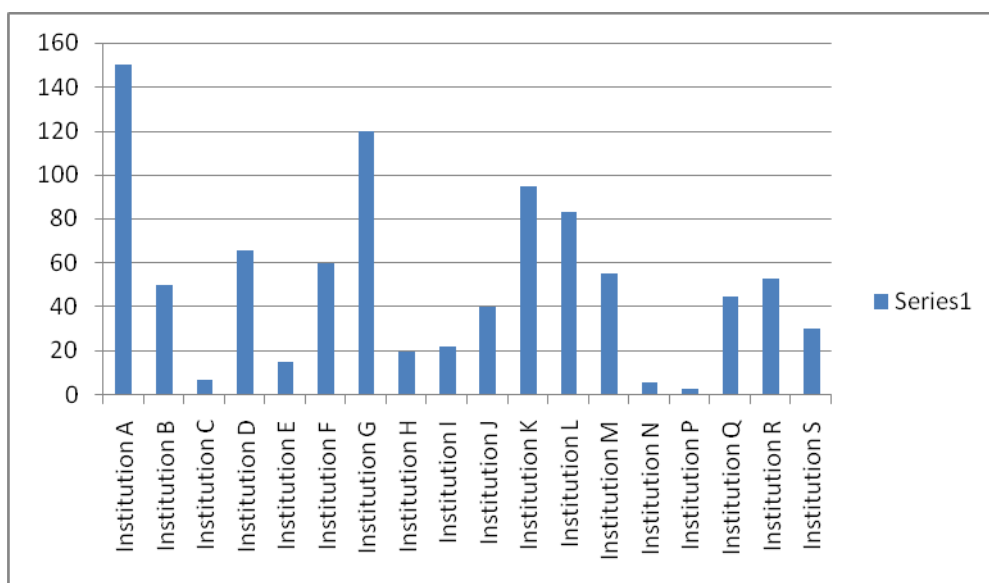
Never-the-less some interesting facts do emerge from this field.

The university which appears to have the greatest amount of ICT support TO SUPPORT THE ref also had the least amount of resource expenditure at three days.

The largest expenditure of effort (one hundred and fifty days) was by a large university that used existing systems but introduced new processes.

The mean amount of resource expended was roughly fifty days

The full range of effort is graphed below; again caution is urged when looking at these figures.



Medium Term Plans

Nineteen institutions responded to this question. Of these there were a range of replies with varying degrees of detail. Several made more than one point and therefore the percentages outlined below sum to more than one hundred.

Three institutions (16%) said they were aware that they needed to do further development but they would wait until the final REF requirements were known before developing a plan.

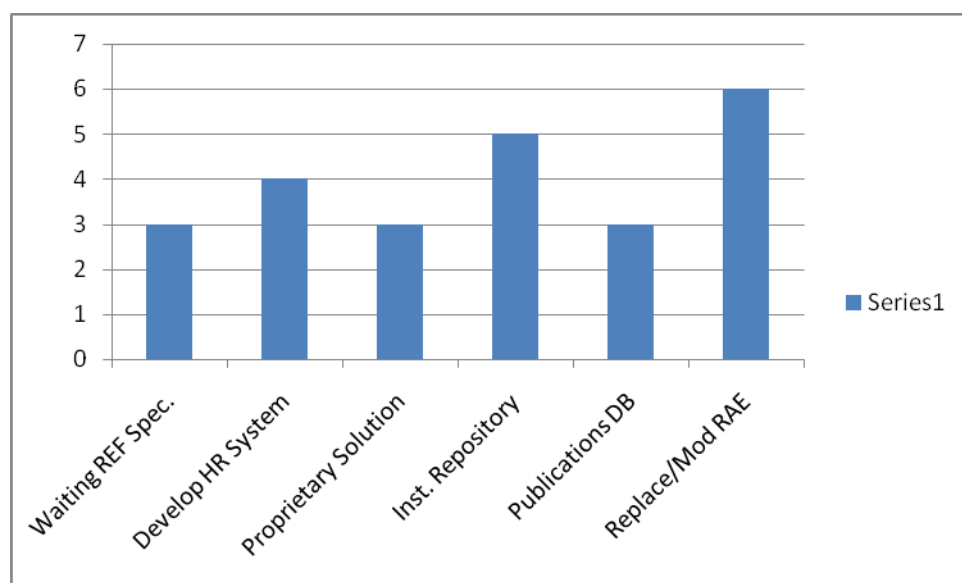
Four (21%) noted that the scope of data and integration of their HR systems would need to be developed.

Three institutions (16%) are considering a proprietary solution.

Five institutions (26%) either have institutional repositories and will develop them further or are intending to implement a repository.

Three institutions (16%) either have or are planning a 'publications database'.

Six institutions (32%) are planning to either substantially upgrade or replace their RAE systems.



Citation Analysis Plans

Nineteen of the institutions answered this question. Of these four (21%) said they had no plans to develop or implement systems to do their own citation analysis.

Of the fifteen (79%) who are planning to implement a solution there were various view points. Five (33%) are actively pursuing a solution and have plans to implement. Three institutions are waiting for a final definition of the REF and specifically details on the information that will be made available by HEFCE. Those institutions with existing institutional repositories are anticipating that either existing or new functionality will meet their demands.

Other institutions are either developing plans or adopting a 'wait and see' policy.

Case Study Institutions

Several institutions have, either formally or informally, put themselves forward to act as case studies.

These are:

Bangor University

University of Birmingham

Bournemouth University

Queen's University, Belfast

Plymouth University

Additionally the University of Leeds and Cambridge University have indicated that they would consider an invitation to be a case study.

The only university to explicitly state that they do not have the time to be a case study was Glasgow (though their head librarian has agreed to meet with me to discuss their plans and perspective on the REF. As I visit Glasgow fairly regularly this should be possible at relatively low cost).

Helpfully most of the volunteering institutions have used a range of approaches and have some aspect that makes them interesting:

Bangor used existing systems to provide the required data but have long term plans for a replacement of their research systems. They are sending a member of staff to Leiden University to learn more about bibliometrics.

The University of Birmingham has a tightly integrated family of systems feeding a data warehouse. They look the least resource to produce their output.

Bournemouth University have an institutional repository. Several other institutions indicated that they were actively considering this route.

Queen's University developed a small system IT system to support the REF and are intending to substantially develop it in the longer term.

Plymouth did not develop any systems to support the REF neither did they use any existing (e.g. RAE) system.

The University of Leeds is part way through a project to implement Symplectic, at this stage it would not be useful to include them.

By most measures Cambridge is untypical. Like Plymouth they effectively managed the REF without either developing systems or using pre-existing systems.

Recommendations

That the five volunteers above are used as case studies.

Consideration is given to whether the sector would significantly gain by including Cambridge.

Stuart Bolton

October 2008