

The Teacher Training Resource Bank (TTRB www.ttrb.ac.uk) and Impact Data for the HEFCE Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2013 – is any action necessary?

A paper prepared for the Teacher Training Resource Bank Editorial and Commissioning Board

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Context

The Teacher Training Resource Bank (TTRB, www.ttrb.ac.uk) was set up in 2002 with the purpose of providing open access to the evidence base underpinning practice in the education sector.

The TTRB has an Editorial and Commissioning Board (ECAB) with members representing the range of teacher training institutions across the education sector and including Training and Development Agency staff and university staff contracted to develop the TTRB. The purpose of this paper is to ask ECAB members to consider the position of the TTRB and associated sites with respect to the provision of impact data for the Research Excellence Framework Exercise in 2013 (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Research/ref/>). Universities being judged for this exercise are required to demonstrate the impact of the work of staff. Precise criteria are to be developed. The Conservatives have said that they will not require impact measurement if elected.

This paper gives at the time of writing, the possible requirements of the Research Excellence Framework which is intended to judge the research strengths of universities. Education departments will be reporting on three areas of work: **outputs** i.e. articles and books (60%), **impact** of research during the period 2008-2013 from research carried out as early as the nineties (25%) and **research environment** (15%). Internationally significant work is given a 4* rating with 1* being nationally significant.

Three audiences interested in TTRB impact data have been identified:

1) **TDA** (and DCSF) representatives are to be invited to take part in the REF to bring a users perspective on impact. It may be helpful for the TTRB to provide these people with data in terms of the impact on the education sector of HEI education staff contributions to the TTRB and associated sites. Independently verifiable data would be needed to back up any claims for impact.

2) **Contributors:** What usage/impact data might the TTRB wish to offer contributors and academics who work on the TTRB and whose work is cited on the TTRB?

3) The **REF panel** itself. The REF is high stakes for many HEIs training teachers. Perhaps even more so as a more equitable distribution of funds was achieved in the RAE 2008 including to many teacher training institutions who previously had not received funds. Education departments have to date been graded considerably lower in research exercises than other departments in universities leading to challenges to education departments about how staff time is spent, loss of jobs and closing of departments. The TTRB operates in an environment where in such institutions staff use of time and the activities they engage in can be expected to be under considerable scrutiny. The REF panel will make decisions about the relevance of work done for the TTRB and associated sites with respect to the research environment it contributes to, the quality of the research outputs it publishes and the impact on the sector of staff contributions to it.

It might be tempting to dismiss the REF as not being relevant to TTRB and TDA interests expressed through support of the TTRB. However, the REF exercise highly rates research which is **significant at the international level** and there is a strong argument for the TTRB ensuring that it is bringing this research at least to the attention of users. There is an endless amount of small scale

work published (5,000 articles on primary MFL pedagogy alone for example were found in a systematic review). In time, as volume of items on the TTRB increases, inclusion criteria might need to be further developed to provide an enhanced scrutiny of quality and significance as otherwise users could be swamped with materials. What would have to happen for producers of research papers to consider publishing on TTRB by preference? Would this be desirable? Might establishing an impact factor play a role in encouraging submissions?

At the beginning, the intention in setting up ECAB was for it to act as an editorial panel with a TTRB e-journal complementing other more general materials added to the site and mirroring the processes for academic journals to ensure that the materials on the TTRB were of the same standing as an academic journal. The intention was to support the TTRB becoming a preferred place for publication offering open publication and wide access as well as academic credibility access to a wide readership and demonstrable impact on the sector.

Possible REF impact measures

The contract holders for TTRB and the associated sites may need to demonstrate impact data and research outputs from this project for the REF but their institutional requirements are not dealt with here where the focus is on data for the TDA/DCSF user representatives and the contributors of research outputs.

It is reasonable to expect that TTRB usage data can demonstrate the number of visitors to an article. This figure has potential value for a contributor as impact data. For example, for the REF, book sales can be included as a form of impact data. An interesting perspective on impact is that on projects where communities of practice exist staff responsible for these can demonstrate engagement with the sector through the membership and newsletter recipient list. There are not good examples of this way of working in education however. Where newsletters are sent usage data is easily collected through web stats which show the clickthroughs. There is an argument for there to be a combined newsletter from the TTRB (compiled according to personal preference) and associated sites given the diverse interests of an educational audience. Newsletters increase clickthroughs and therefore usage.

There are three years before the REF deadline, which gives time to implement some simple processes. One might be feedback to originators of the top ten or twenty articles per month with an annual top ten. If these could be linked with an awards night that TDA are already sponsoring eg Teaching Awards, all the better.

ECAB members may also wish to reflect on whether there is any merit in inviting specific submissions to fill gaps. Papers published in journals are submitted at no cost to the journal however given the TTRB relationship with the TDA contributors may expect payment if the work is perceived as 'for government'.

A possible opportunity for ECAB or TTRB and the associated sites is to publish a gap analysis, identifying what knowledge is needed by the sector (using for example the Schulman forms of knowledge work, pedagogic strategies and curriculum areas as a framework for analysis), what is available, what is not available and then putting out a call for papers on to fill the gaps.

The consultation over the REF closes shortly. Does ECAB have any view on 'impact' or the exercise in general that it wishes to feed back to HEFCE?

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19 October 2009