

Forensic Psychiatry Research Society

7th June 2006

Professor Peter McGuffin
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Dear Professor McGuffin

Re: Research Assessment Exercise 2008: Forensic Mental Health

We are writing to you on behalf of the Forensic Psychiatry Research Society to raise some of the issues that are pertinent to the assessment of forensic psychiatry and psychology in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise.

As you will be aware, there are essentially the four major components to forensic psychiatry research: firstly, the study of legislation with regards to mental health; secondly, the study of the associations between crime and mental disorder; thirdly the study of systems and services not normally dealt with in medical practice, such as special secure hospital provision, prisons and probation; and lastly study of victims and survivors of crime and abuse. In academic forensic psychiatry there is therefore a considerable overlap with criminological and legal research, and, as a relatively new specialty, much emphasis on practice research in an area with small populations of slow turnover. We understand from a range of recent publications that some of the problems we have in delivering strong academic developments are common to other clinical specialties, but some, we think, derive more specifically from the nature and history of our specialty. The issues are set out more fully in the document on the future of forensic psychiatry prepared for the Forensic Psychiatry Faculty of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and a copy of this is attached.

We wanted particularly to seek your advice in two areas. First, we are aware that the size and nature of external grant funding for research will be one aspect of assessment in the forthcoming RAE. We understand that this may seem like a key indicator of external validation of research in the field, but worldwide this is an area for which little money is allocated for funding and which will never attract development of major specific charities such as the National Heart Foundation or some of the cancer charities. This has been highlighted as a significant bar to progress in the USA as well as here. Furthermore, there are no university funded posts in forensic psychiatry, and so even those few academics who have university appointments are allowed only a small sessional input for research. Pro-rata ratings of grant income would be helpful, but it is not clear that that will be an option. How would you advise us to deal with this?

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The second area of concern we have relates to impact factor ratings of publications in the field. Some of the highly specialist journals in which we typically publish are appropriate for the task, and have high standards of reviewing, for example the British based *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology*, *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health* or *Medicine, Science and Law* and the US based *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* or *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*. Their circulation will never compare, however, with such journals as the *Archives of General Psychiatry* or *Nature*, so, inevitably, do not have the impact factors of these journals. There was an indication earlier in the process of setting up the forthcoming RAE that smaller specialties, which cannot be fully represented on the RAE panel, might nevertheless be consulted on how to prorate impact factors for these smaller circulation publications. We would welcome your views on how we might contribute to this.

If you have any further, general advice on how we might best present our work for the purpose of the RAE, this also would be very welcome.

We are grateful to you for consideration of these points.

Yours sincerely

DR LINDSAY THOMSON, President

PROFESSOR PAMELA TAYLOR, Secretary

PROFESSOR DON GRUBIN (Treasurer)

Enc. RCPsych paper on the future of academic forensic psychiatry