

RANK HYPOCRISIES






BENCHMARKS

1.1 SOME ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES OF PEER REVIEW

Few decisions are as consequential for the funding and reputation of British universities as those of REF panels. The REF casts a correspondingly long shadow over academic life in all institutions with research aspirations – above all the self-described ‘24 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research’ that make up the Russell Group and the ‘11 world class research-intensive universities’ of the former 1994 Group.¹ Improving on RAE 2008 rankings was a key objective in university strategic plans in 2009–2013, and bettering REF 2014 performances is already a priority for what has (tellingly) come to be known as the next REF cycle. The imperative to maximize REF scores increasingly drives how research itself is conducted, affecting what is studied, how it is funded and where it is published. It also influences academic hiring and promotion decisions, with candidates’ ‘REFability’ often trumping all other considerations. What began back in 1986 as a ‘light touch’ periodic appraisal has spawned internal university bureaucracies that *continually* monitor and increasingly seek to manage individuals’ research. Once upon a time it was not thought necessary for every university department in the country to have its very own research director, but that time has long passed. So integral has the REF become to the life of UK universities that many British academics would likely have trouble imagining a world without it.

¹ See the groups’ websites at <http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk> and <http://www.1994group.co.uk> (accessed 29 December 2013). The 1994 Group dissolved itself on 8 November 2013, following the exodus of Durham, Exeter, Queen Mary and York for the Russell Group in 2012 and the subsequent departure of Bath, Reading, St Andrews and Surrey. Warwick and LSE, now members of the Russell Group, were once members of the 1994 Group.



Strangely enough, elsewhere academic research gets evaluated and university reputations are established without such time-consuming and expensive national audits of every department's 'outputs' – as our papers, articles and books have become known in REF-speak. The British system of research appraisal reflects a very British academic culture, whose idiosyncrasy is not always appreciated by commentators at home or abroad. The RAE/REF has certainly attracted international attention, but it has seldom inspired emulation. As *Nature* once put it, '[the UK's] national research assessments have evolved over the years in ways that other agencies around the world have examined – although few, if any, have imitated the extreme extent to which the outcomes directly influence subsequent funding.'² While some EU states are beginning to experiment with mechanisms intended to ensure a better fit between institutional research performance and future government funding, only the former British imperial dominions of Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong currently have anything remotely comparable in conception or scale to the REF. But the lack of a national research audit does not necessarily indicate that university research is not valued – or evaluated.

The United States – whose universities occupy seven of the top ten slots in the *Times Higher Education World University Rankings* (and 17 of the top 20 slots in the *Shanghai Academic Rankings of World Universities*)³ – have no equivalent of the REF. But academics' research there is routinely evaluated, as anybody familiar with the tenure and promotion processes at any halfway decent American school will know. The crucial difference with the UK is that the mechanisms of evaluation are *internal* to the normal functioning of the academic profession rather than being externally administered by the state. Funders, whether public or otherwise, rely upon and respond to measures of reputation of both institutions and individuals that are established within the academy itself. The most important of these are bound up with peer-reviewed publication in top-drawer journals or (in the case of monographs) with leading university presses. Venue of publication operates as an initial indicator of quality, and after an article or book has been published, citations and reviews provide further indicators of impact on an academic field. The upshot is a virtuous (or, depending on your point of view, vicious) circle in which schools such as CalTech, MIT, Princeton or Harvard can attract the best researchers as indicated by their publication records, whose presence will in turn bring further prestige and research income to those same institutions. The logic

² 'The Greater Good'. *Nature* (editorial), 30 December 2013.

³ Times Higher Education. 'World University Rankings 2013-14', <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2013-14/world-ranking>; 'Academic Ranking of World Universities 2013', <http://www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU2013.html> (both accessed 5 January 2014). Compare 'QS World University Rankings', <http://www.topuniversities.com/qs-world-university-rankings>.

is explained succinctly in *The Top American Research Universities*, a publication of the State University of Arizona's Center for Measuring University Performance:

At the point of hiring, the university first expresses its standards relative to research productivity by employing only those who show significant promise and past productivity in research. The promotion and especially the tenure process at American research universities also establish the standards for performance by keeping those who can perform at a competitive level and discouraging or dismissing those who cannot ... The best research universities make the best bets on future performance and they invest to make sure their bet is a winner.⁴

Perhaps the best place to begin this discussion is therefore with tenure, something that was abolished in Britain under the Thatcher government's 1988 Education Reform Act. Tenure in North America is 'an arrangement whereby faculty members, after successful completion of a period of probationary service, can be dismissed only for adequate cause or other possible circumstances and only after a hearing before a faculty committee'.⁵ 'Other possible circumstances' would typically include severe financial exigency – tenure is meant to safeguard academic freedom, not protect against economic realities. Assuming an assistant professor has survived whatever annual or mid-probation hurdles a university puts in place, he or she would normally expect to come up for tenure after five or six years. While the record of teaching and service are important factors in tenure decisions, it is research that is critical. The most important indicator of research performance is publication. Expectations of outputs will vary according to the university. The History Department at the University of Oregon – which I have chosen as an example here because it is a good public university, but far from being an Ivy League school – is not unusual in requiring 'a published book or a completed manuscript that has been accepted for publication at a reputable press'. In appropriate areas of the discipline, articles may be submitted instead, but 'it is unlikely that fewer than six to eight would be viewed as a scholarly equivalent to a book' – a book, here, meaning a scholarly monograph based on original research. Candidates are also warned: 'Generally, books and articles should appear in highly regarded and peer-reviewed outlets'.⁶

⁴ Lombardi JV (2010) In pursuit of Number ONE. In: Capaldi ED, Lombardi JV, Abbey CW and Craig DD (eds) *The Top American Universities: 2010 Annual Report*. Tempe: Arizona State University, Center for Measuring University Performance, 7.

⁵ American Association of University Professors, 'Tenure', <http://www.aaup.org/issues/tenure> (accessed 20 December 2013).

⁶ University of Oregon, 'Promotion and Tenure Policies: History Department', <http://academicaffairs.uoregon.edu/sites/default/files/HISTORY%20Promotion%20and%20Tenure%20Guidelines%202011.pdf> (accessed 5 January 2014).

Acceptable forms of academic publication vary across disciplines in ways that are not always well understood, even within universities. In the sciences the norm – indeed, in most instances, the only form of publication that will be considered in tenure or promotion proceedings – is the scientific paper, which will often be co-authored by several members of a research team. Books count for little since they only summarize existing knowledge for teaching or popularization purposes rather than adding to it. In the humanities, on the other hand, the book is widely seen as *the* form in which the findings of a substantial research project are most fully and adequately presented, and the research monograph remains the gold standard against which other types of scholarly publication (the article, the book chapter, the edited collection, the translation, the scholarly edition, etc.) are compared. The social sciences fall somewhere in between, with economics or psychology following the science model, while cultural anthropology or the more qualitative areas of sociology are closer to the humanities. The Oregon History Department's equation of six to eight articles to one book would make no sense in chemistry or engineering, but it accurately reflects the respective values put on these forms of scholarly output in humanities disciplines. The one-size-fits-all approach of the REF for the most part ignores such differences, allowing a book to count at best as equivalent to only two articles, whatever the norms of the discipline.

Publications in the humanities are seldom multi-authored and are often much longer than those in the sciences, meaning that historians generally have fewer publications on their CV than chemists. A history article can often run to 10,000 words or more. Book chapters are also a respectable form of publication in the humanities, where the edited collections in which they are published are seen as advancing a field. Scientific papers are usually published quickly and their shelf life – the period during which they are actively being read and cited – tends to be short. The expectation in the sciences is that knowledge advances rapidly and cumulatively, so that research findings will in most cases soon be superseded by new research. In the humanities and parts of the social sciences the situation is quite different: there is usually a much longer gap between acceptance and publication, but books and articles may still be read and cited years later – indeed longevity of influence is the hallmark of a classic in its field. Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (left unfinished at his death in 1940, published in 1982), Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966) or Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) remain important reference points across humanities and social science disciplines. The fact that sociologists still draw on Marx, Weber and Durkheim – or philosophers on Plato and

Aristotle – does not indicate lack of progress in these disciplines so much as a different model of knowledge.

North American universities differ in the extent to which they quantify publication requirements for tenure. Many top schools do not, preferring to give flexibility to tenure committees. The Faculty of Arts and Science at New York University, for instance, takes the view that ‘It is neither desirable nor possible to define an abstract and universal standard of measurement, and context may well become a criterion in judging the strength of a particular candidate’. This is very far from a licence for laxity. ‘Is the candidate for tenure among the strongest in his or her field, in comparison with individuals at similar points in their careers at NYU, nationally, and, if relevant, abroad?’ the guidelines ask. ‘Each case must be examined in some detail by making explicit comparisons, by delineating special strengths and acknowledging limits or weaknesses. These factors must be carefully and openly weighed’.⁷ Though precise expectations will vary across disciplines and between schools, it is safe to say that a candidate for tenure at any good North American university will have to meet exacting standards not only in quantity but also in quality of published research.

Crucially, whatever the university, whatever the field and whatever the form of publication, a publication invariably must have been through a *recognized process of peer review* prior to acceptance; otherwise – if it has been published on a personal website, for instance, or by a so-called ‘vanity press’ – it will not be eligible for consideration in tenure proceedings. The reputation of the journals and publishing houses in which articles and books appear also has a considerable bearing on how favourably publications are likely to be looked on by a tenure committee. Again, the degree to which this is formalized in terms of journal impact factors, rejection rates or rankings will vary according to the discipline and university, and open access and new forms of web-based publication have undoubtedly complicated the publishing landscape. But even where no formal ranking exists, some journals will invariably be viewed as being more prestigious than others. The same holds for monographs, with the major university presses at the top, smaller university presses next and commercial publishers bringing up the rear. Some North American schools will only accept books for tenure if published by a university press.

The link between peer review and reputation is close. Few people would argue that every article accepted by a so-called top-drawer journal or every book published by Harvard, Princeton or Chicago University Press is of a uniformly

⁷ ‘New York University Promotion and Tenure Guidelines’, <http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/promotion-and-tenure-guidelines.html> (accessed 28 December 2013).

high standard, or would deny that excellent work gets published elsewhere. Inferior scholarship can slip through the most scrupulous of peer reviews and the outstanding can easily be missed – especially, perhaps, when it is genuinely innovative and as likely to perplex as to impress reviewers. It is nevertheless widely accepted within the North American academy that venue of publication can generally act as a proxy for quality because of the rigour of the peer review processes of the top journals and publishers and their correspondingly high rejection rates. Leading journals and presses typically commission at least three reviews for each manuscript to ensure a spread of opinion as well as to counteract possible intellectual biases. Additional reviews may be sought when a first round of assessments conflict. In the case of major university presses, the final decision on acceptance of a completed manuscript – even where there was an advance contract – is taken by an editorial board made up of experienced academics on the basis of several external reviews and the author's response. Whether for books, articles or scientific papers, the key criterion in choosing reviewers is whether or not they are *qualified by their own records of publication in the relevant field of research* to evaluate the manuscripts they are asked to read. Editors seek informed assessments by scholars who know the field well enough to evaluate the contribution in relation to its existing literatures and current debates.

Potential reviewers will be asked to declare any conflicts of interest that might cloud their judgement; immediate colleagues, research collaborators and former students (or supervisors) are usually disqualified. For major journals the process of review is ideally double-blind – the reviewer does not know the author's identity and vice versa. Nor do reviewers know each other's identities. In journals in smaller, more specialized academic fields, double-blind review can often be impractical but reviewers remain anonymous to the author and one another. With books the author's identity is usually known to reviewers but not vice versa. Because of the high degree of specialty of much academic research and the corresponding scarcity of people genuinely qualified to evaluate it, editors may consult in advance with authors over suitable reviewers – including asking if there are any people in the field who should *not* be approached because of intellectual disagreements – but the final choice of reviewers will remain unknown to the author. Reviewers provide detailed comments on manuscripts, often according to a template of headings drawn up by the journal or press. These will be conveyed to authors along with the decision to accept, reject or encourage revision and resubmission. Protecting the anonymity of reviewers is important because it allows them to express their opinions, however critical, without reservation. At the same time full communication of reviewers' comments to authors makes the reasons for publication decisions transparent and may sometimes allow those decisions to be challenged.

The same general principles of peer review apply in competitions for research grants and fellowships, which have become an important element in university reputation and income on both sides of the Atlantic. These are funded by federal agencies such as the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and National Science Foundation (NSF) in the United States or Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), as well as by private bodies such as the Andrew W. Mellon or Wenner-Gren foundations. Major granting agencies in the UK include the seven government-funded research councils grouped under the umbrella of Research Councils UK (RCUK), whose mandate is 'investing public money in research in the UK to advance knowledge and generate new ideas which lead to a productive economy, healthy society and contribute to a sustainable world'.⁸ Learned societies such as The Royal Society (for the sciences) and the British Academy (for the humanities) and charitable foundations such as the Nuffield, Wellcome and Leverhulme trusts also fund research. Although the details of their adjudication procedures will vary, all such agencies base their decisions on the advice of *a range of independent and appropriately qualified external assessors*.

The National Endowment for the Humanities, to take a prominent example, has a four-stage review process. First, applications are considered by 'a panel of outside experts in the relevant areas', whose evaluation 'informs all subsequent levels'. There are three to six evaluators per panel, chosen for 'their expertise in the relevant disciplines, topics, and areas, as well as their overall breadth of knowledge in the humanities', and each panel appraises 15–40 applications. To guard against intellectual gatekeeping, 'no evaluator may serve in consecutive years for the same grant program or on more than two convening panels in any calendar year'. More than 200 panels, involving nearly 1000 outside experts, evaluate around 5700 applications for 40 grant programs annually. Second, 'NEH's staff synthesizes the results of the outside review and prepares a slate of recommendations for the National Council on the Humanities; third, the National Council' – 'an advisory body of twenty-six members who have distinguished themselves in the humanities ... nominated by the President and confirmed by the US Senate' – meets in Washington, DC, to advise the Endowment's chairman on applications and matters of policy; and fourth, the chairman considers the advice he or she has received and makes the final funding decisions.

Without compromising the confidentiality of 'applicants, evaluators, staff, and Council members', NEH goes to considerable lengths to ensure transparency and accountability in its disbursement of what are after all large sums of public money:

⁸ 'About the Research Councils', <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/about/Pages/home.aspx> (accessed 5 January 2014).

It is a matter of public information that an evaluator served on an NEH panel: The agency announces its review panels in the *Federal Register* and lists panelists' names in its annual reports ... NEH announces the names of award winners in each competition on its website. Importantly, all applicants can receive upon request the evaluators' ratings and written comments, though NEH does not provide the names of the evaluators with their comments.⁹

Peer review is not a perfect system of appraisal, and few would claim that it is. Its major drawback is that the people best qualified to be reviewers by virtue of their standing in a field are also likely to be the people with the most turf to protect and the largest axes to grind. Peer review can turn reviewers into gatekeepers unless steps are taken to avoid it. At its worst this can lead to the monopolization of whole fields by entrenched orthodoxies, marginalizing critical perspectives and ossifying disciplines. Even where this danger is avoided, peer review can discourage intellectual risk-taking on the part of authors and editors, the former because they are desperate to publish, the latter because they do not wish to offend referees. It is a truism that the highest ranked journals in a discipline are not always the places where the most challenging research is to be found. They tend to be bastions of what Thomas Kuhn called 'normal science', resistant to the scientific revolutions that periodically shift intellectual paradigms.¹⁰ This can create serious problems for junior faculty who are doing genuinely innovative work (and discourage them from doing so), because the journals most likely to publish them are not the journals most likely to impress tenure committees.

As a long-time editor of a peer-reviewed journal¹¹ – as well as a scholar whose work (like everybody else's) has been hopelessly misunderstood on numerous occasions by reviewers for both journals and research councils – my response to these arguments is similar to Winston Churchill's description of democracy: 'the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time'.¹² Peer review has undeniable imperfections and any sensible editor or program officer for a funding agency will be alert to them. But it remains the best procedure the academy has yet devised for

⁹ 'NEH Grants. NEH's Application Review Process', <http://www.neh.gov/grants/application-process#panel> (accessed 5 January 2014). Emphasis added.

¹⁰ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962.

¹¹ *The Journal of Historical Sociology*, which I co-founded with Philip Corrigan in 1988. The current responsible editor is Yoke-Sum Wong.

¹² Winston Churchill, House of Commons speech, 11 November 1947, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1947/nov/11/parliament-bill> (accessed 24 February 2014).

reconciling a measure of quality control with fairness to authors and openness to new ideas. It may sometimes – perhaps often – fail in one or other of these objectives, but it is better than funding and publishing on the basis of in-house judgements alone. The latter provide no better guarantee of quality and are an obvious route for patronage and intellectual cloning. But we need to be clear on what peer review can and cannot achieve. It may, and hopefully usually does, provide a filter for weeding out work that does not meet the minimum professional standards of a scholarly community. But peer review does not provide objectivity, and still less does it guarantee truth.

Indeed, the tacit admission underlying all peer review is that *there can be no single, definitive, objective assessment of the quality of new research*. It is obviously preferable to have specialists evaluate work than people with no expertise in the field. Experts can judge a manuscript or research proposal in relation to existing knowledge and make an informed guess as to the significance of whatever it offers that is new. But the latter judgement is *always* going to be subjective – and the more genuinely novel the ideas in question are the more fallible a reviewer's judgement of their significance is likely to be, especially if that reviewer has an investment in the ideas that currently define the field, which most experts by definition will. That is the reason why leading academic journals, university presses and funding organizations always seek a *range* of expert assessments. This maximizes the possibility of faults being picked up before money is committed to a research project or a manuscript accepted for publication. But no less importantly, it also ensures that truly original research – the kind of research that changes the landscape rather than merely adding to a field – has a fighting chance of seeing the light of day.

1.2 EVALUATING RESEARCH: TENURE AND PROMOTION IN NORTH AMERICA

To have published enough peer-reviewed books, articles or papers in the right places does not guarantee tenure in North American universities even when the rest of the record (teaching and service) is satisfactory. Tenure is granted only after a more detailed appraisal, during which a candidate's publications – along with all other aspects of his or her performance since being appointed – are subjected to further evaluation. The *Promotion and Tenure Guidelines* in the History Department of the University of Oregon, to return to my earlier example, require that 'publications must make significant contributions to scholarship *in the judgment of outside referees in the candidate's field*'.¹³ Published research

¹³ University of Oregon, 'Promotion and Tenure Policies: History Department'. Emphasis added.

now goes through what is in effect a second round of peer review, designed to establish whether it was not just a contribution to scholarship (which we can assume it was by virtue of its being published in a peer-reviewed venue) but a *significant* one. This is not dissimilar to REF panels' attempt to distinguish between 2* outputs ('Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour') and 3* ('Quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour'); so it is worth attending carefully to the procedures involved.

Since referees play so important a role in the North American tenure process and that process is so consequential for both the individual (a negative decision can be career-ending) and the university (tenured faculty may be colleagues for life), universities do not take their selection lightly. At the University of Oregon the Department Head is charged with preparing 'a list of external referees who will be invited to evaluate the research record of the candidate'. Heads are required to 'consult with members of the department and, when appropriate, members of any research institute/center with which the faculty member is affiliated' over the choice of appropriate reviewers. Candidates are then asked to prepare a separate list of referees of their own choosing. 'These processes', the guidelines stress, 'must be independent'. External reviewers 'should generally be from comparable or more highly regarded institutions. Ideally, they should be Full Professors who have *the appropriate expertise to evaluate the candidate's record*'. Conflict of interest provisions apply – a candidate cannot, for example, nominate a former PhD supervisor. A minimum of five external reviewers is required, a majority of whom must be taken from the department's list. The guidelines do not specify exactly which materials should be sent to reviewers but it is normal for all of a candidate's publications to be made available along with a CV and a statement summarizing 'scholarly accomplishments, agenda, and future plans'.¹⁴

The external reviewers' reports (a minimum of five, together with biographies of the reviewers)¹⁵ are then added to materials provided by the candidate to form a tenure dossier, whose first port of call is a departmental committee that will scrutinize the file and recommend whether or not tenure is merited. The committee's report must include 'a summary and evaluation of

¹⁴ University of Oregon, 'Promotion and Tenure Policies: History Department'. Emphasis added.

¹⁵ A tenure dossier 'must include ... at least five letters from external reviewers' and 'biographies of external reviewers and a description of any known relationship between the candidate and the reviewers'. University of Oregon, 'Promotion and Tenure Policies: History Department'.

the external and internal referees' assessment of the candidate's work'. This report is made available to all tenured faculty members in advance of a department meeting, which discusses the case before proceeding to a vote by secret ballot. The Department Head then writes a statement including

a description of the process, including any unique characteristics of the profession (e.g., books versus articles; extent of co-authorship; significance of order of names on publications, etc.). The statement also offers an opinion regarding the case for promotion and tenure that may or may not agree with the department vote.

The file – which by this point comprises the tenure dossier (including referees' reports), the departmental committee's report, the record of the department vote and the Head's statement – is then forwarded to a Dean's Advisory Committee made up of two faculty members from each of the three divisions of the university's College of Arts and Sciences (Sciences, Social Sciences and Humanities). This committee discusses and votes on the case and forwards the file to the Dean, who 'writes a letter evaluating the research, teaching, and service record of the candidate based on the contents of the file'. After writing this letter the Dean meets with the candidate and 'indicates whether or not he or she is supporting promotion ... and answers any questions with regard to the position taken on promotion and tenure'.¹⁶ The Dean's recommendation then goes to a ten-person elected Faculty Personnel Committee, which in turn examines the file, votes on whether tenure should be granted and passes on its recommendation to the Provost. Members of the Dean's Advisory Committee and the Faculty Personnel Committee cannot participate in discussion or vote on cases from their own departments. Decisions must be *seen to be* independent. If this all seems a laborious procedure, we should perhaps recall that it is about choices between jobs for life and wrecked careers.

The final decision lies with the Provost, who has the option of meeting with candidates in difficult cases. His or her verdict can be reviewed 'only if the decision was flawed by improper procedure, by illegal discrimination, or by arbitrariness or capriciousness ... process, not standards, is the only ground for appeal'. There are once again parallels here with the REF: many UK universities similarly limited the grounds on which staff could appeal against their exclusion from REF submissions. The kinds of impropriety that might be grounds for appeal at Oregon include: 'If you feel the departmental report and outside letters have been inadequately summarized for you, or that your case has been misrepresented, or that internal bias exists and you have been treated unfairly'.

¹⁶ University of Oregon, 'Promotion and Tenure Policies: History Department'.

Appellants are advised ‘to get a “reality check” from a disinterested but knowledgeable third party’ before embarking on any ‘injudicious’ action, but advice is nonetheless given on where further remedy may be sought, including the university’s grievance procedure, the Oregon Bureau of Labor, the Civil Rights Division and the Oregon Courts.

Mindful, no doubt, of the risks of litigation, the university does its utmost to ensure that it is not vulnerable to challenge on procedural grounds. Care is taken to provide transparency through publication of the kind of detailed descriptions of procedures that I have been quoting (which are all posted on university websites). These guidelines are written in clear English rather than legal or bureaucratic gobbledygook and make clear to candidates exactly what should happen when. The university also ensures accountability by identifying all parties involved at every stage in the process, specifying their responsibilities with regard to the progress of the file and requiring them to produce written reports justifying their conclusions. The *only* people involved whose names will be kept from the candidate are the external referees. Should a candidate, after meeting with the Dean, believe

aspects of your work have been misrepresented, misunderstood, or omitted, you may respond in a written statement which will accompany the materials at subsequent review levels ... This step in the review process is intended to ensure that all candidates are informed of the contents of their dossier so that they may know if their case is adequately represented from their vantage point.¹⁷

Details of procedure will, of course, vary between institutions. But the principles of how research is evaluated in the tenure process are pretty standard throughout North American universities. Only peer-reviewed publications are eligible for consideration, and whether or not formal journal or publisher rankings are employed, the venue of publication matters. Peer review is understood in the sense set out in the first part of this chapter. In the course of tenure proceedings, publications are further appraised by several external reviewers specifically appointed for the purpose, who are chosen not only for their eminence in the profession – they are usually expected to be of Full Professor rank – but above all for their *specialist knowledge of the candidate’s field* as reflected in their own publication record. Care is taken to ensure that reviewers are ‘arm’s length’, but candidates are usually given some say in their choice. There is always a range of external appraisals – research evaluation for tenure

¹⁷ University of Oregon, Office of Academic Affairs, ‘Evaluation and Promotion – Tenure Track’. <http://academicaffairs.uoregon.edu/evaluation-and-promotion-tenure-track> (accessed 21 April 2014).

(or promotion) purposes will never be left in the hands of a single individual, no matter how expert or eminent that person may be. While reviewers' identity will be kept anonymous, candidates are provided with at least a summary of their comments (to which they will have the opportunity to respond).

Departmental colleagues often have input into the tenure process, which may, as in Oregon, be expressed through a formal vote. At the University of Alberta, where I sat on the Arts Faculty Evaluation Committee (which considered all promotion and tenure cases) for seven years, Heads of Department were required to take soundings of the opinion of tenured colleagues, but no departmental vote was taken – perhaps to avoid the politicking that is widely seen as marring American tenure processes. In cases where there was a difference between the departmental view and the recommendations of external assessors, the committee was usually more inclined to go with the externals. Institutional cultures differ. The ultimate decision, however, is invariably made at a level higher than the department, on the basis of recommendations by faculty and university committees that have *independently* scrutinized the cumulative file. Such committees are usually cross-disciplinary in composition, often have some elected members and exclude members from discussing and voting on cases from their own departments. The process is governed by clear and explicit rules, which are designed to ensure that evaluations are both competent and fair. In most cases this framework will have been drawn up through collective bargaining with staff associations or unions and enshrined in a legally binding faculty agreement that can only be modified through formal renegotiation.

In most North American universities tenure automatically entails promotion to Associate Professor; so there is no separate procedure involved.¹⁸ The publication expectations for promotion to Full Professor are obviously higher – the Oregon History Department, for instance, requires a second book (or equivalent), together with other evidence of

professional standing and impact on the scholarly field, as demonstrated by the evaluations of external reviewers, awards, membership on boards of journals and professional organizations, and the like; external grant funding; conference attendance and presentations; and other activities that are signs of professional regard, including editorial activities and providing promotion reviews for other institutions.¹⁹

¹⁸ Harvard University is a prominent exception, only offering tenured appointments at the Full Professor level.

¹⁹ University of Oregon. 'Promotion and Tenure Policies: History Department'.

External reviewers of publications for Full Professor promotions are expected to provide highly detailed reports. When I recently participated in such a review for Harvard University I was not only asked to comment in detail on the two books and six articles sent to me, but also to rank the candidate relative to five other named scholars in the field, giving my 'frank advice and candid opinion' of their respective merits.²⁰ Expectations of the impact of publications on a field will also be significantly higher than the expectations for promotion to Associate Professor, and committees may want to see evidence of citations of papers and reviews of books. But the procedures through which published work is evaluated and the committee structures involved are similar to those employed for tenure and need not detain us further here.

Let me be clear from the start: I am *not* against the evaluation of research. Nor do I oppose universities' right as employers to act upon such evaluations to advance or hold back individuals' career progression within the institution – up to and including dismissal for breach of contract, if necessary, so long as this is done through due process of the sort enshrined in most North American faculty agreements. All I insist upon is that such evaluations should be made on *proper academic grounds* and through the use of *proper academic procedures*, including, above all, *proper peer review*. Defenders of the UK's national research assessment system like to describe it as a process of 'international benchmarking'. What I have set out in this chapter are some international benchmarks against which to measure the evaluative procedures employed by HEFCE and individual British universities in the context of REF 2014. The central claim of the UK's research evaluation system has always been that it 'is essentially a peer review process'.²¹ Judged against the standards outlined in this chapter, I shall argue, that statement is indefensible.

²⁰ Private communication from a Department Chair at Harvard University.

²¹ HEFCE, *Review of research assessment: Report by Sir Gareth Roberts to the UK funding bodies* (May 2003), 4, http://www.ra-review.ac.uk/reports/roberts/roberts_summary.pdf (accessed 19 March 2014).