

## [Frameworks threaten discovery](#) [1]

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Since the 1980s, universities' research funding has been allocated through periodical Research Assessment Exercises ? in which research submitted by each university is ranked by a specialist, peer review panel. However, this is changing, with the government set to reward funding through a Research Excellence Framework (REF). Under this system, a quarter of each institution's funding will depend on the "economic, social, public policy, cultural and quality of life" impact of their research.

Like most government plans, this sounds ever so well meaning. However, also like most government plans, it is likely to have unintended consequences. As Educators for Reform have [pointed out](#) [3], when new information is discovered, it is often unknown what purpose it may serve. X-rays, liquid crystal displays and Google's search algorithm all came from abstract, blue sky research, and their productive use in society was far from immediately clear. By encouraging academics to constrict their areas of research or direct them towards an "objective" goal, we could miss out on the discovery of important new knowledge. This framework would also pose the risk of a brain drain, where frustrated academics move to abroad to where there are fewer constraints on research opportunities.

The government should not be meddling in the progress of science and academia. If funding is to come from the state it shouldn't be allocated on the basis of supposed economic and social development, but by an analysis of the quality of research, as decided by peer review. When will governments learn that the best outcomes tend to ensue when experts in their own fields are left to order things as they deem best?

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