

## **Metrics and emotions: perspectives from anthropology**

**Abstract submitted for consideration in DOES QUALITY COUNT? ON THE ROLE OF METRICS IN ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY POLITICS.**

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The emergence of measures and targets at the heart of academic life is at once a social and technical achievement. Critical scholarship has focused on theorising these new forms of university governance rather than the disciplinary emotional regimes (Reddy 2001) that support or contest their legitimacy. The affective dimensions of academic affiliation, vocationalism and autonomy are all key to an understanding of accountability politics and its power.

In this paper I unpack one such emotional regime, drawing on a range of archival sources to document how anthropologists confronted the Thatcher government's budget cuts of the early 1980s, and the precedents these exercises set for subsequent research assessment exercises.

I combine historiography with ethnographic vignettes to explore the affective dimensions of 'excellence' in the social sciences today. Experiences of this redefinition of academic practice differ markedly across academic generations, institutions, fields and the academic life-course. I show how the responses and 'proactive adaptations' (Morris and Rip 2007) of social scientists range from disciplined ignorance to ambivalent complicity, from institutional nostalgia to politicised critique, and from academic activism to bureaucratic entrepreneurialism.

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