

Arts and Humanities User Group – Report of a Meeting at Royal Historical Society, Monday 25 November 2013

1. 18 learned societies were represented. This represents about half of the current AHUG list.
2. There had been only a moderate response to previous suggestions that AHUG be scaled up somewhat (e.g. by levying a small capitation fee, borrowing some staff time, establishing a web presence). The consensus seemed to be to retain the current structure – a loose mailing list, with meetings every 6-12 months. The RHS was happy to continue hosting. **Societies were reminded that if they wished to circulate the list at any time, they should contact the RHS** (pm297@cam.ac.uk or rhs.info@sas.ac.uk).
3. There remained the option of adopting a new name. Peter Mandler had proposed Arts and Humanities Alliance. **Societies are asked to express views on this, if they have them.**
4. **Open Access.** There was general satisfaction that funding bodies' policies seemed to have shifted in the direction of acknowledging the particular needs of the arts and humanities (e.g. Green rather than Gold options; decent embargo periods; wider choice of licence). An issue of continuing concern, hardly addressed, was the problem of 'third-party' permissions, which meant that (e.g.) publications in music and art were unlikely to be available on Open Access in unmutated (or indeed usable) form. Peter Mandler agreed to circulate the minutes of the first meeting of HEFCE's Monographs and Open Access reference group (attached with this report).
5. **REF2014/2020. It was agreed that it would be desirable to have a meeting in early 2015 specifically to discuss this**, based on analysis of submissions to REF2014 (when available). It would be important particularly to see what biases have been introduced into the assessment by the impact criteria (e.g. exclusion of early-career researchers whose PhD research is by definition ineligible for impact). There was general support for limiting any further extension of the impact element in the assessment, while finding other ways to indicate that arts and humanities scholars were widely engaged in impact activity.
6. **A-Level reform.**
 - a) 'Facilitating subjects'. There was widespread scepticism about the Russell Group's promotion of certain subjects as 'facilitating' entry to HE, especially as their own admissions policies rarely followed the advice given in their publication 'Informed Choices'. There was concern about the effect of this advice as A-Level choices narrow further under the press of 6th-form finance and the abolition of the AS/A2 distinction.
 - b) The Smith Review. Disquiet was expressed at the way in which review of A-Levels had been commandeered by the examination boards, with relatively little direct input from HE, despite the stated intentions of the DfE. **Societies were encouraged to participate in the two consultations on A-Level reform:** the DfE's on subject content, based on the Smith Review (<https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=consultationDetails&consultationId=1934&external=no&menu=1>), deadline 20 December, and Ofqual's on the regulatory framework (<http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/a-level-regulatory-requirements-october-2013/>), deadline 17 January.

7. **AHRC BGP2/DTP and Master's recruitment.** The AHRC DTP awards represented a 25% reduction in the number of institutions funded, but only something like a 15% reduction in the value of funding, which was perhaps better than might have been expected. There was widespread concern about Master's recruitment, taking into account the de-funding (and sometimes the delegitimization) of M-level programmes by the research councils, and also the mounting undergraduate debt levels under the new fee regime since 2012. It was too soon to tell the full effect of these changes, however. Furthermore, HEIs were still hesitating about how to price Master's degrees in these new market conditions. Some HEIs were offering more MRes options. M-level recruitment needed to be closely monitored, but this was made difficult by the lack of a central authority such as UCAS for undergraduate degrees. There was uncertainty over whether it would be better to argue for, i) inclusion of M-level study in the undergraduate fee regime (as adopted by many science disciplines through BA/MSci programmes), ii) 1+3 Master's/PhD programmes, iii) acceptance of longer PhD programmes without the Master's degree.

8. **BA recruitment.** There had been no catastrophic falls as yet, though modern languages had absorbed continuous smaller declines over several years now, and architecture had been badly hit. It was possible that inclusion of modern languages in new accountability measures for schools (including the E-Bacc) might help to shore up BA recruitment.

9. Another meeting would be called in 6-9 months' time. Societies were encouraged to suggest agenda items at any time between now and then.

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27 November 2013