

# Liaison Meeting

2 December 2015

## Wolfson II, Senate House Institute of Historical Research

**Minutes of a meeting with representatives of:** Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Association of Business Historians (ABH), British Agricultural History Society (BAHS), Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Economic History Society (EHS), Historical Association (HA), History Lab Plus, History UK (HUK), Institute of Historical Research (IHR), Royal Historical Society (RHS), Social History Society (SHS) and The National Archives (TNA).

**Present:** Ian Broadbridge (AHRC), Marcus Collins (HUK), Sumi David (AHRC), Henry French (BAHS), Jane Gerson (RHS), Matt Greenhall (TNA), Claire Mussen (ESRC), Jeremy Neathey (ESRC), Lucy Newton (ABH), Rick Trainor (EHS [in the chair]) and Sarah Wingrove (AHRC).

**Attending:** Maureen Galbraith (EHS)

### 1. Welcome and apologies for absence

Rick Trainor welcomed participants to the meeting, which was one of two held annually (in summer and winter) with representatives of learned societies and the research councils, the latter attending the winter meeting only. It was noted that turnout was smaller than usual due to a clash with a similar meeting, recently arranged by the British Academy.

Apologies for absence were received from: Henrice Altink (SHS), Kate Bradley (HUK), Justin Champion (HA), Teresa da Silva Lopes (ABH), Cath Feely (History Lab Plus), Lawrence Goldman (IHR), Peter Howlett (EHS), Karen Hunt (SHS), Valerie Johnson (TNA), Peter Mandler (RHS), Mark Overton (BAHS), Rebecca Sullivan (HA) and Mary Vincent (RHS).

### 2. Minutes of the meeting of 2 December 2014

The minutes were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

#### Matters arising

##### 2.1 AHRC Leadership Fellows Scheme (agenda item 3.4 on minutes)

The AHRC had reviewed the concerns, highlighted by the RHS at previous meetings, including:

- The lack of clear guidance about what constitutes 'leadership'.
- The shift of emphasis from quality of scholarship to entrepreneurship in the allocation of research funding.
- The impact on early career researchers of the emphasis on 'leadership'.

The scheme continues with the current guidance, which emphasises quality of scholarship and is reviewed on an ongoing basis. The impact on early career researchers will be monitored and data, when available, will be provided. **[Action: IB/SD]**

The difficulty of identifying mid-career researchers, applying to the scheme, was noted.

### **3. Minutes of the meeting of 14 July 2015 and matters arising**

The minutes were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

#### **Matters arising**

##### **3.1 Attendees at future meetings (agenda item 2.2 on minutes)**

As agreed at the July 2015 meeting, History Lab Plus had been invited to send a representative to this meeting; they had been unable to do so on this occasion.

##### **3.2 The Census (summary responses to 2021 consultation) (agenda item 3.1 on minutes)**

As noted at the July 2015 meeting, the EHS had submitted a response to the ONS consultation, entitled 'Content of the 2021 Census'. No other bodies present at the meeting had made a return.

##### **3.3 Open Access (OA) Publishing (agenda item 4 on minutes)**

The meeting noted the response, drafted by the Arts and Humanities Alliance (AHA), an affiliation of subject associations and learned societies, to the 'Guide to Open Access Monograph Publishing for Arts, Humanities & Social Science Researchers', produced by OAPEN and fund by the AHRC and JISC. Continuing anxieties remain about the impact of OA on History.

### **4. AHRC**

#### **4.1 Postdoctoral update**

Ian Broadbridge and Sumi David spoke to the circulated papers on applications to, and awards made from, the AHRC's postdoctoral schemes. The LS group welcomed the provision of project titles of those awards whose primary classification was 'History', supplied in response to a request at the previous meeting. It was noted that success rates in 'History' are falling but remain higher than the AHRC average. It was thought that this was due to a flat budget and the increasing cost of applications; the AHRC is conscious of receiving fundable applications for which there is no budget.

#### **4.2 Postgraduate update**

Ian Broadbridge spoke to the circulated papers detailing information on postgraduate applications and awards. The LS group noted, in response to last year's request, that it is currently not possible to provide a list of PhD thesis titles due to data protection issues. It may be possible to do so for future meetings; the group encouraged the AHRC to pursue this issue. The group also requested a breakdown of postgraduate awards, similar to that provided for postdoctoral awards, i.e. by time period, geography, etc. **[Action: IB]**

#### **4.3 Peer Review College**

Ian Broadbridge spoke to the circulated paper summarising the membership of the AHRC Peer Review College. The LS group noted the slight decline in numbers from 2014, but an improvement on those of 2012.

#### **4.4 AHRC Management Information**

Sumi David and Sarah Wingrove spoke to the circulated papers on AHRC management information. A pilot project, focused on 'History', is currently underway to analyse how the AHRC might better understand information about current research within the arts and humanities as it relates to its funding portfolio.

The LS group welcomed the opportunity to be involved in this project and encouraged its continued development, including liaison with cognate initiatives. Information on a proposed workshop would be provided in due course. **[Action: SD/SW/MG]**

## 4.5 AHRC personnel

The group noted that the incoming AHRC chief executive would be Professor Andrew Thompson.

## 5. ESRC

### 5.1 Research Grants

Jeremy Neathey and Claire Mussen spoke to the circulated papers detailing Research Grant applications and awards, across all disciplines, for the periods 2010/11 – 2014/15. It was noted that, of the 11 applications received in this round in 'Economic and Social History' five have been processed and one award made.

Decisions on the remaining applications will be announced in late December 2015.

**[Action: CM]**

The group welcomed the wide variety of projects funded in the period 2010-15. As for the AHRC, budget constraints do not allow funding of all fundable and high quality applications. While welcoming the increased percentage rate over the previous year, the group noted that the total number of awards made to 'Economic and Social History' in recent years is small.

### 5.2 Studentship Awards by discipline

Jeremy Neathey spoke to the circulated paper detailing the number and proportion of studentships awarded by discipline. Numbers for 'Economic and Social History' have remained broadly consistent. Henry French, whose institution, University of Exeter, is a member of the Southwest Consortium, reported that a steady stream of studentships had been funded, in particular, in 'Economic and Social History'. The group noted that the research councils encouraged collaborative working.

### 5.3 Plans for supporting doctoral training

Jeremy Neathey spoke to the circulated paper outlining the ESRC's future plans for supporting doctoral training when the current Doctoral Training Centre (DTC) funding ends; the new network will be known as Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTP). In response to a concern raised about institutions that are not part of a consortia, he observed that a smaller number of bids have been received in this round but that there has been considerably more collaboration, and previous DTCs have been encouraged to build partnerships where feasible. An analysis will be undertaken in 2016 about capturing excellence across the sector.

**[Action: JN]**

Ian Broadbridge endorsed the pro-consortia approach of the ESRC.

### 5.4 Peer Review College

Jeremy Neathey spoke to the circulated papers: an overview of the Peer Review College; new College members in 2015; and information on usable reviews and reasons for declining to review (2014/15).

**Overview of the Peer Review College:** the College has been live since 2010 and, following a review, was refreshed in 2015; it now has approximately 2,000 members.

**New College members 2015:** the LS group was asked to notify the ESRC of any gaps on the list; additional names were welcomed.

**[Action: All]**

**Reasons for declining to review:** the group noted that there are a variety of reasons for declining to review, including: 'outside expertise', 'too busy' and 'conflict of interest'.

The LS group was encouraged to use the new peer review training tool.

## **6. Green Paper: 'Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice'**

The group lamented the almost complete absence of discussion in the Green Paper on the topic of postgraduate study and expressed particular concern about:

- the proposal that research would no longer be funded and regulated by the same entity that regulates teaching;
- QR funding;
- the desire for the increased use of metrics to assess research excellence.

The LS group agreed to make a contribution to a response to the Green Paper under the umbrella of the Arts and Humanities Alliance. **[Action: JG/PM]**

## **7. The Nurse Review of the Research Councils**

Rick Trainor spoke to the circulated recommendations from the Nurse Review of the Research councils. While pleased to note that no recommendation to wind up the individual research councils had been made, the group was concerned at the lack of clarity around which organisation would be responsible for project funding and for QR. A dual support system of funding, through the research councils and QR, is favoured by the group. The group was also pleased to note that the review defines science and research in the broadest possible terms.

The LS group agreed to contemplate contributing to a response to the review under the umbrella of the Arts and Humanities Alliance (using the same material as that used for the response to the Green Paper).

**[Action: JG/PM]**

## **8. Comprehensive Spending Review**

The group noted the substantial reduction in the budget of the Department for Business, Information and Skills (BIS) and the lack of detail as to where savings might be made. BIS would be pressed for clarity.

**[Action: All]**

## **9. Any other business**

### **9.1 The National Archives**

Matt Greenhall spoke to his tabled paper summarising changes, both internal and external, at The National Archives. He welcomed comments and highlighted:

- TNA's parent department would move from the Ministry of Justice to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.
- TNA's new forward plan for the next four years, called 'Archives Inspire' would include an Academic Scoping Study to consider how the academic landscape is changing and how TNA currently sits against this backdrop. An online survey, which it is hoped will include contributions from across the academic community, will be published in January 2016.
- TNA is keen to engage more actively with the academic community as partners.

## **10. Date of next meeting**

A meeting of the LS representatives would be scheduled for July and one for all participants, including representatives of the research councils, in December, at the IHR.

**[Action: MG]**

RHT/MG  
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