
Minutes of the Meeting of the Steering Committee held on 6 February 2016 at IHR, 11a.m.

Present: Dr Kate Bradley Co-Convenor (Kent), Dr Marcus Collins Co-Convenor (Loughborough), Dr Richard Hawkins Treasurer (Wolverhampton), Dr Daniel Grey, Secretary (Plymouth), Dr Robert McNamara (Ulster); Dr Andrew Roach (Glasgow); Dr Karin Dannehl (EHS), Dr Charles Insley (Manchester), Dr Paul Corthorn (Queen's University); Dr Ariel Hessayon (Goldsmiths); Dr Peter D'Sena (Hertfordshire); Dr Sabine Clarke (York); Dr Sarah Miller-Davenport (Sheffield); Dr Mark Hutchinson (Lancaster); Mr Tom O'Donnell (Postgraduate Rep - UCL); Dr Alison Hems (Bath Spa); Dr Sara Wolfson (Canterbury Christ Church); Dr Lucie Matthews-Jones (Liverpool John Moores); Dr Juliane Furst (Bristol); Dr Martin Johnes (Swansea); Dr Ariel Hessayon (Goldsmiths)

1. Apologies for Absence

Dr Bill Aird (Edinburgh); Dr Heather Shore (Leeds Beckett); Professor Maureen Meikle (Leeds Trinity); Dr Lowri Ann Rees (Bangor); Dr Mark Clapson (Westminster); Dr Rachel Bright (Keele); Dr Rachel Lock-Lewis (South Wales); Dr Cath Feeleley (History Lab +); Dr Jamie Wood (Lincoln)

1. Minutes of the Last Steering Committee Meeting

Charles not there, Sara was! Peter sent apologies.

2. Matters Arising from the Minutes

MC: We discussed at last minute possibility of making the SC meetings less institutionally based, more around matters of common interest to historical profession. Along these lines we talked about bringing in RCUK people, or those representing European funding bodies, or people who do digital publishing work. Kate and I have been talking about this and we are suggesting that at the next SC meeting on 14 May we invite someone from the British Council who administers European funding, and getting them to talk about how to apply for these big collaborative European grants. The implication of this is that we would truncate the business aspect of the SC meeting, so it would still be an 11-1 meeting but around 12pm we would have a speaker of some description. That would also mean some of

the reports currently delivered orally would need to be circulated in advance as written reports. This would aim to create more time for a speaker to present. This is just a suggestion, we can try and see how it proceeds. What does the SC think?

Charles Insley: A very good idea – I would strongly endorse the suggestion of getting someone from digital publishing. We all are being steered towards digital platforms by our institutions which is starting to set the agenda for teaching and we should have a think about this.

Sara Wolfson: Would be good to have a speaker who has got a grant to give their ideas

Lucie Matthews-Jones: Can we get someone on a Saturday?

MC: We should decide whether or not to do it before then going down a list of people wanted to find someone who will come to a Saturday meeting. I think we have a good chance at this.

Robert McNamara: what about a history editor from one of the scholarly presses?

MC: That sounds very good

Kate Bradley: Next item is representation at the SHS

MC: We haven't got a panel, but we are still thinking of a flyer in the conference pack and possibly a representative spreading the word about History UK if someone on the SC is already going?

Mark Hutchinson: I will have to check but since I am actually at Lancaster I should be able to do this.

MC: Thanks, we will also look into what we need to do

KB to investigate the conference pack idea

3. Welcome to new Steering Committee members

Done!

4. Convenors' Reports:

i. History Subject Association

MC attended a meeting on 2 December 2015 – not the best attended because there was a clash with the British Academy meeting that day. So it consisted of a number of us from subject associations or learned societies, and the business of the day was really to go through stats from the AHRC and ESRC about how they had dispersed their grants and studentships. Some discussion of the Nurse Review and of the Green Paper. Brought up issues of doctoral training partnerships, which a number of SC members had raised as being problematic in concentrating the postgrad studentships in small number of institutions. I brought this up, but was not popular for doing so. The RCs are of opinion that this is a very fine arrangement and were unwilling to commit to widening the number of institutions involved in these partnerships. That was dispiriting – more encouraging was that the ESRC which 2 years ago had awarded no large grants to historians awarded 2 last year. The take home message here is the chances of getting AHRC grant funding are considerably better than getting ESRC grant funding – I am happy to provide the statistics for that. There was also a breakdown of the kind of history that was getting funded for both grants and studentships.

KB- Were there any headlines about that?

MC- Not from off the top of my head, but I can share that with people if they are interested.

Andrew Roach- We submitted our feedback on the consultation, is there any news on when this will be responded to?

MC: this was before the end of the consultation period so that didn't arise, but what did with the Green Paper was that we agreed to see what the RHS had come up with and then feed into their document and be a co-signatory to that.

Richard: With the ESRC, there were 2 awarded to history- but they do also award to other subjects which might include history?

MC: That's quite true, all we have are the official stats they produce so it might be people are going under the radar. But generally it seems they are unpeiomrising rterritory.

Charles: Did they say how many studentships they are awarding? Becuase we built our MA around accreditation requirements for the ESRC, so it would be good to know if we are chasing a phantom there....?

MC: The AHRC were quite content with the idea that History was getting the largest number of PhD studentships aside from languages and literature, so over 15% of all

doctoral studentships. The lion's share of those are going through doctoral training partnerships.

MC goes through statistics

Andrew Roach: Did they give any indication about the issue of abolishing DTCs, which the panel was concerned about?

Kate Bradley: We are thinking about revisiting our constitution and seeing if there is anything that needs tweaking – we are going to discuss this in May. This is mainly about checking that the terms of reference and so on are still useful for the committee. Anything about this that occurs to you, please do send it on.

5. Treasurer's Report

Richard Hawkins: Everything is looking relatively good at the moment – we have a closing balance at the moment of about £11k, we made a surplus on the plenary which is good. We're about halfway through the collection of subscriptions at the moment.

MC notes that we are generally doing better but asks all SC members to double check their institutions have paid up, because this and the plenary are our only sources of income. The last plenary was successful financially- we cleared about £1000 from that- but we are still in a situation where our financial climate is unclear, and particularly whether there are going to be exceptional forms of expenditure which may eat into that. That is unfortunate as we would like to do more than we currently can.

Richard Hawkins: As you will recall from the last meeting, I floated the idea of having some sponsorship for the next plenary from people such as Gale and so on, which I will be following up on, that might also bring us some freebies as well as sponsorship.

6. Secretary's Report

Could people please get in touch with Daniel if they have suggestions for revisiting the constitution.

Juliane Furst: Is there a particular reason for revisiting the constitution?

MC: Trying to update it – media officer not a part of the exec at the moment

7. Media Officers Report

Jamie Wood cannot be here, so MC passes on report. Main job of media officer has been to create a new website and venture into the world of social media. In both of these areas there has been progress, albeit with the website a little slower than we would like. We have a prototype for the website. It is Wordpress based, but will be accessed via the old web address of History UK when it goes online, and will contain links to social media – really it is functional, pretty basic, but we are going to expand into re-blogging material which we think is useful in those categories. MC notes he has sent on some suggestions, JW and his colleague working on this are meeting next week and intend to have something online very shortly. We need to take over the domain name by the end of march so this will happen before then. It is important as a window onto our world: if anyone has comments or suggestions then please do let me know so I can share them with Jamie. In terms of social media, we have a twitter feed, and are now up to 1400 subscribers. The twitter feed is sparing in its posts (last one is from 23 January at the moment), we run a rota system for this and it has been quite useful, it has built up a loyal subscription base and is a good way of getting information out to the profession and the community. Website and twitter feed are mutually dependent, and Jamie notes that once we have a superior website this will generate traffic to the Twitter feed and vice versa.

Lucie: Are people going to be encouraged to write thought pieces?

MC: That would be wonderful, but we're realistic and know it will be easier to reblog than to commission.

Richard

8. Green Paper/Teaching Excellence Framework

KB – Just to thank everyone who responded to our very tight draft of the call for comments – happy to re-circulate what I have so far. Made a suitable case for some of the elements of the proposed TEF which may not work so well on the ground.

MC- The RHS put a useful summary of their response at the beginning

Charles- the worry has to be that given the proclivity of this govt for evidence-free policy making is that we can produce what we want, and they will ignore it

Juliane: The contact hours is our big issue, and it comes out when we investigate they don't really want *contact hours* they want detailed time with fewer other students . There is a complete disconnect between what STUDENTS mean by contact hours and what the government means by this.

MC: We jumped to a 12/10/8 model and are repenting at leisure, and the Russell Group institution we modelled this on are also regretting it.

Juliane: We too have done this, and we really need to take control over this and introduce another term for the thing. This is a linguistic problem in part.

Charles: We don't include office hours in this

Juliane: What they really want is another seminar with 10 people round the table. It is a much more nuanced demand than what they actually articulate.

Andrew: The 12/10/8 model seems surprising.

Juliane: Its a communication thing in many ways

Karin Dannehl: They don't necessarily want more contact hours, as much as contact – via email and so on.

MC – one role for HUK is maybe to describe to colleagues our different experiences of contact hours

KB – we had conversations about contact hours, but fortunately timetabling explained we didn't have the rooms for this.

Charles: Small group teaching is key for student happiness, but this is hugely resource dependent.

Juliane – this emphasis on good teaching comes out of our own initiative and freedom. This is a really crucial point to make – they've tried to get away from teaching to test in schools, and this is even more important for universities. I think that this point cannot be stressed enough and we need to warn against the idea that with better control and more centralisation you get better teaching.

Charles – Institutions then decide that one model fits all and they shoehorn departments into it. We need to make clear that, for example, 60 credits of employability does not work. Institutions think very narrowly, and we need to guard against this.

Karin: Driven by the fact that humanities are cheap – so we're awkward in that sense.

Charles – We subsidise courses like medicine massively, which gives the humanities a certain amount of clout in terms of being robust about how teaching excellence is measured.

Peter: I've not heard anything about TEF yet, but I suspect there are 2 different conversations happening in BIS, about light touch and metrics. I fear that the conversation takes no account of our views.

Andrew: Our overlords, following on from Peter's point, is the idea of institution private providers being set up. Do we have any info on any of this?

MC: My immediate reaction is that this is unlikely to affect history very much. It is mainly vocational degrees offered to international students that seems to be where significant private provision is – and this is very low quality, there have been an enormous number of scandals associated with this. So the attempt by the government to introduce private competition hasn't worked so far, and my instinct is that is the least of our worries.

Charles: I think people like law have more to worry about than we do.

Richard: I think Pearson were looking into this a few years ago – whether they abandoned it...?

Juliane: I know that they decided the humanities was not a good idea to go down because if you are going to do short degrees, then you don't want to do them.

9. Early Career Historians

KB - This is something that was mentioned in previous meetings, and how people get a toehold in our profession. One thing discussed last time was the idea of trying to sort out honorary fellowships for people in the limbo before they get a permanent post. One of the things I have noted (but via Twitter) is that the British Library seem to be making some Reading Room electronic resources available outside if you have a readers' ticket.

MC- The main concerns are giving people periodical access and a stable online email presence between temporary contracts. The two things we have to decide are 1) do we want to pursue this? And 2) how do we do it? My personal feeling is that we are not a big enough player to do this solo, so we would need to collaborate with a group like the RHS and IHR to do it.

KB – it would be useful to get a sense of how many institutions do this and what they do

Andrew – I think institutions are only just catching up with the situation

Lucie – what are we offering here that would be different/

MC – This is about lobbying, trying to encourage people to make this a common practice. I think it is definitely worth exploring, on a university-by-university basis even if the national context is not

Sabine – Quite a lot of overlap with the UCU anti-casualisation agenda?

Martin J : This is where HUK can be a force for best practice

Charles: be useful to even collate the data, just so we know what subscribing institutions are doing. How many people are we talking about, too? It would be good to know what the scale of the issue is.

Lucie: Could we also add retired staff too, who are hit by many of the same issues like losing library and email access

Sabine: UCU has got a lot of data – my main scholarly society has had a lot of discussion about how to support best independent scholars, so it would be good to get ideas about what other organisations are interested in this?

Peter: Would be good to get History Lab and Histpry Lab Plus involved in this, and check on the committee report which was written about this?

Karin: Be good to look at employability figures for ECRs

Sara: So would we be offering our own badge to ECRs?

MC : No, we don't have the resources, so we would be needing to try and encourage other institutions

Peter: One thing with the IHR would be to emphasise this would not cost them money

Juliane: Why not abolish institutional affiliations at conferences?

Andrew: Some grants need an institution to apply for them though

Charles: We have quite a lot of people contributing to our wider conferences, and there we don't put institutional affiliations for exactly the reason we want to avoid those sorts of unconscious hierarchies

MC and KB to investigate and report back in May

KB- passes on Cath Feeley's suggestion for a jobs boot camp aimed at ECRs, and asks the SC if they would like to contribute to this on the afternoon of the May meeting.

MC we would be giving preference to people with a PhD in hand – so getting them to do mock interviews. We can't pay travel costs but hoped we could pay for a meal afterwards for people who came to the event.

Volunteers for this event – Juliane, Charles, Sara, Andrew R, Daniel, Marcus, Kate

Lucie: Do we want to think about other academic types beyond ECRs?

MC: This is something with MCR people

Charles – this is a big issue for people at SL roles who may have massive admin roles.

KB- While we are looking around for ECRs – also scope around for issues affecting MCRs and what we can do to support them. It would be good to know the state of the field

10. 2016 Plenary

KB: We are interested in ideas from the SC here – digital publishing, TEF?

Juliane: What about impact?

MC: Ideas for speakers also welcome

Robert: It's pretty easy to work out who did best with impact, we could look into that?

Juliane: ESRC seems to have people who work exclusively on impact?

Lucie: What about impact from the ground up, because we are all having to think about this?

Charles: Managing a historians' career could be a good one?

Ariel: What about getting one speaker per career stage?

Mark Hutchinson: We need to give a positive spin on whatever is put down on the agenda

11. Reports from:

i. Northern Irish Representatives

Sector under considerable pressure at the moment.

ii. Scottish Representatives

Andrew: Not a lot to report here, the report on governance is almost completed and announcement of 3.5% funding cuts in December.

iii. Welsh Representatives

Rachel has kindly submitted a written report which was circulated to the SC.

Martin notes that tuition fees are likely to be the THE key issue in May elections, and in the autumn budget the Welsh Government announced a 32% cut for education – there is the possibility of QR vanishing entirely.

12. Reports from:

i. Historical Association

MC notes there will be a matchmaking style event at the next HA conference (20-21 May) for anyone interested in doing impact case studies involving schools. They will have the opportunity to pitch what they are doing, and to talk to teachers with a view to getting ideas and developing case studies and getting volunteers for them. That is something I will be sending an email to the SC about. MC will be doing a talk surveying all undergraduate UK history programmes at this event, so may be checking with SC members whether the info about curricula on university websites is up to date and accurate.

ii. Royal Historical Society

Nothing to report

iii. Institute of Historical Research

Nothing to report

iv. History Lab/History Lab Plus

KB reads out report from Cath Feeley

v. Postgraduate Representative

Tom: Most issues have already been raised, but concern about contact hours put onto teaching assistants

13. Any other business.

Discussion of plan for HEA to raise fees.

Thanks to Andrew for putting in the AHRC consultation response.

14. Dates of future meetings

14 May 2016