

Minutes of History UK Steering Committee Meeting

Saturday 2nd May 2020

Venue: Zoom

In attendance: Nandini Chatterjee, Jamie Wood, Martin Johnes, Sarah Hackett, Tracey Loughran, Eliza, Karen Jones, Karin Dannehl, Lucie Matthews-Jones, Bronach Kane, Kate Cooper, Luc, Euryrn Roberts, Kristen Brill, Adrian Howkins, Sara Barker, Stewart McCain, Simon Peplow, Alex Titov, Richard Hawkins, Sara Wolfson, Heidi Mehrkens, Christienna Fryar, David Stack, Robert McNamara, Inge Dornan, Manuela Williams, Elizabeth Tingle, Kate Cooper, Charlotte Alston

1. Welcome

Lucie and Jamie welcomed those present to the virtual meeting. Nandini Chatterjee explained some of the key principles for operating the Zoom meeting, including muting your mic, and how to raise your hand (with a thumbs up). All members of the committee introduced themselves via the chat function.

Lucie spoke about how History UK might move forward in the next few years, by returning to its key functions in terms of policy, advocacy, and lobbying for our subject. While the RHS has been increasingly active in some areas of policy, the nature of its membership and structure mean there are some areas of advocacy that it cannot tackle, and these are areas where History UK is better placed to act.

2. Executive Committee posts

a. Co-convenorship vacancy

Yolana Pringle (Roehampton) has stepped up to be co-convenor, and she introduced herself to Steering Committee members. Yolana will be nominated officially at the November AGM and will be working with Lucie and Jamie to learn the ropes and help to plan future activities. She is particularly keen to drive the direction of our policy on issues that affect our discipline, developing a longer-term strategy over the next few years.

b. Research Officer

Sara Barker (Leeds) will be joining us as the new Research Officer. Sara introduced herself. She is in the early stages of planning an event that might support people in how to do research when it isn't possible to travel to archives. This might be geared particularly towards people in non-secure positions.

3. Reports from institutions

Lucie and Jamie invited SC members to give perspectives from their individual institutions, on responses to the current crisis. The discussion was wide ranging. Some of the key areas of concern were: moving from the current 'emergency mode' in teaching to what we might do in September, either entirely online or in a blended way; what the impact of the pandemic would be on student recruitment; the implications for

extensions of fixed term contacts for precarious staff; the question of reintroduction or not of caps on student numbers; the possible closure or ‘contraction’ of programmes; the ED&I dimensions of blended learning; clearing strategies and the focus on conversion activity; impact on research, including the postponement of sabbaticals at some institutions and cutting off of research funds; the impact of both staff and students not being able to do archival work; the disproportionate effect of lockdown on women and carers; and the ‘corporatisation’ of mental health issues.

While some institutions are clearly being adaptable and communicating well, there were concerns about areas where practical measures were not being taken to address workload. The committee discussed areas where we might lobby effectively – particularly around the need for real investment to make blended learning work, rather than a reliance on the ‘emergency’ measures that have been developed so far; and about the possibilities for cooperation rather than competition between universities in delivering education in the new environment.

4. Finances and subscriptions

Jamie, Lucie and Richard have advised Sue to discontinue collecting subscriptions for the time being, because of the administrative difficulties of collecting payments in the current environment, and because we will not be running costly physical events this year. They put to the committee a plan to suspend subscriptions for 2020/2021. Institutions that have already paid for this year would not be directed to raise a subscription for 2021/2022. We currently have £19,788.42 banked and enough money to pay 2 years of Sue’s wages (c£7200). If we suspend subscription then it is imperative that we as an organisation make sure that we have an active programme of activities and policies to attract departments to re-subscribe.

In the discussion some concerns were raised about whether waiving subscriptions gave the impression that the work we are doing right now is not essential. Given the high attendance at this SC meeting and the vibrant discussion it seems HUK has as important a role as ever, if not more so. A payment holiday runs the risk of making institutions more reluctant to resubscribe. It was suggested that we either reduce the subscription this year, or quietly waive fees rather than explicitly telling departments that we do not plan to charge for this year.

In the discussion a suggestion was made that in future years we might proactively invite people from institutions that do not currently subscribe to HUK to our events, in order to involve them and encourage them to subscribe.

5. Future events and activities

a. History Matters – 2020 Plenary/ AGM

We had planned ‘History Matters’ as the theme of our 2020 Plenary. It may be possible for the Plenary to go ahead, but even if this proves impossible, we’d like to host a series of virtual events (vlogs, blogs, powerpoints, live events, etc.) that will explore the themes of History Matters. This stemmed in part from our discussions with Sunderland,

about the closure of history programmes there, which demonstrated the need to emphasise the value of history.

We are especially keen to get SC members to lead areas and to create virtual activities that will be of benefit to our subject area.

In the discussion, the following suggestions were made:

- It might be a good idea to work with diverse history societies on it; EHS, Social history and capitalise on synergies
- It would also be helpful to work with societies and institutions outside the academy. Curate an event online involving other associations?
- It would also be possible to involve people who have done history degrees and work in roles where they feel the value of their degree?
- Could we involve subjects/associations that relate closely to history too, e.g. archaeology?

This event could be an important way of launching or emphasising our focus on policy and advocacy – i.e. getting people to see HUK as something they want to invest/be involved in.

Some suggested speakers / participants:

- Raphael Samuel History Centre and/or History Acts
- Alison Wood (Cambridge) - researches the history of the idea of the university and its many purposes from interdisciplinary perspectives. Also directs Homerton Changemakers, which is about employability and the wider relevance of university degrees (particularly Arts & Humanities) [YP]
- History and Policy (Alix Mortimer and/or Laura King)
- Producers of In Our Time or The Long View?
- Greg Jenner or Rebecca Rideal as people who work in the media

Suggested activities:

- If fits with theme/content, I could run session on history & public engagement based on work on creating a toolkit using historical source materials to improve confidence & emotional wellbeing with adolescents? V. far from an expert on this but would include reflection on difficulties! [TL]
- The British Society for the History of Science had success running a conference on Twitter (each presenter had to summarise their paper in a 12 tweet thread). Posts have since been collected together on their website. It could serve as a model for a virtual plenary.
- Could we try to spark a larger conversation around a History Matters hashtag? [YP - I'm not much of a Twitter user but a couple of my colleagues have 100k+ followers!]

Nandini Chatterjee proposed an additional future HUK event on Decolonising the Curriculum. Inge Dornan and Sarah Hackett also happy to help with this.

The SC also discussed the possible afterlives of such events, and how we might develop useable resources from them.

b. teaching event/ project

Prior to the meeting Kate Cooper collected information via a survey about how different individuals/institutions are handling the transition to digitally-based teaching. She is considering the possibility of organizing a small project and/or workshop on this theme over the summer.

16 people contributed to the survey – it is clear from the results that different institutions are dealing with things in very different ways right now. There are a range of challenges. Amongst the many concerns there are also some positives – for example the benefits of asynchronous delivery as a way of supporting students and staff; the possibility of digital delivery allowing some students to come out of themselves a little more. While this is an unwelcome disruption it is one that we can explore and use productively (while also being aware of the ways this might be unhelpfully used by senior managers).

Kate led a discussion of what might be useful as a way forward. She mooted three possibilities: 1) Some kind of drop in discussion; 2) a means of hearing from people with experience of teaching digitally or in a blended format; 3) access to / mapping of advice/guidance that could be inert, e.g. webpage, about resources, tool types etc. She raised the question also of what is best suited to our capacities as a group.

In the discussion some members pointed to resources that have already been developed: the IHR has already pulled together a list of digital resources; there is another put together by Sarah Kenny at Birmingham.

SC members mentioned the following things that might be valuable:

- Practical examples of good practice in operating seminars and other sessions online
- A consideration of challenges for areas such as black British history where there aren't a lot of digital resources
- Some consideration of ways of creating engagement online with new cohorts of students, and especially community building
- The question of ED&I, and how to address this in a digital environment
- The question of different digital approaches between students and staff (different technology being used)
- Questions about copyright of materials

Kate will produce a second informal survey to summarise these possibilities, and also what people could offer or put work into. Sara Wolfson, who is now at the Open University, mentioned that colleagues at the OU would very likely be able to help.

c. Survey for policy

We are thinking about putting together a survey to gather knowledge on what's going on in our subject area and what we can do. What should a survey like this look like and consist of what? How can we be sympathetic to sector and national differences?

We can only do this with the support of the SC. Is this something you can assist with. Do you have any ideas or time to give? We would like to survey departments, department leads, and colleagues. Would you be interested in working with us to survey the sector?

Question: Do we need a policy officer?

d. Sunderland activity

Jamie spoke to this. We had been planning an event at Sunderland that would link to the theme of History Matters, but this has now been postponed, HUK also sent our open letter regarding the closure of the history programmes at Sunderland to Sunderland's VC, and he sent a very interesting response which highlights some issues that we need to take forward.

e. Postponed activities

- Simon Peplow (ECR/PhD Rep.) thanked everyone who volunteered/offered help for the planned Academic Job Boot Camp, and particularly Inge Dornan for organising Brunel as a venue. The event will return in brighter days! He emphasised the need to support people entering the job market now more than ever, and raised the possibility of running a virtual bootcamp. Given that people are now being interviewed online too, there was some support for this – it might also address challenges we have previously had about attracting applicants from different parts of the country.

Sarah Holland (Education Officer) was organising an event for May on assessment – that is obviously postponed. More about this later.

6. Future History UK activities

We would like to gather your thoughts on History UK activities over the coming months, in the context of the lockdown but also more broadly. Please If you have any ideas, please feel free to let Lucie and Jamie know.

Jamie and the Committee thanked Lucie for all the work she has done as co-convenor. She will still help with setting up some things going forward.