

Cutting Edge Research

The Academy has recently completed its first consultancy award from the ESRC, to review and identify current and evolving research in leading social science journals. The findings were presented to the ESRC Research Priorities Board and excellent comments have been received. Ian Forbes will present some of the fascinating aspects of his findings to a special Dinner to welcome new Academicians in the autumn.

STC Consultation

Thanks to Carol Riddington, Technical Director, Social and Market Research, who produced a written response to the inquiry of the Science and Technology Committee of the House of Commons into short-term research contracts in science and engineering. She was grateful for the replies of Academicians and Societies to our call for contributions to this consultation.

Our response made salient points about casualisation, and emphasised the particular circumstances that affect the social sciences.

Latest Decisions from the ESRC Research Priority Board

- Transport/mobility will now be taken forward in 2003 as an investment where the ESRC is seeking co-funding from other interested parties
- European Governance will be one of two steers for the Priority Networks competition
- Gender will be the other
- World macroeconomies will be taken forward into the discussions of a Board sub group on the Board's portfolio of investments in the Economic Performance and Development Theme
- New Programmes will be developed on Ageing, NGOs and Ethics

There is an important innovation to be noted. There will be an *open competition* for Research Centres this year, on any topic consistent with the Council's priority themes.

Strategic Forum for Social Sciences in the UK

The most recent meeting of this group, which includes representatives from the ESRC, government, the Academy, charitable agencies and the British Academy, discussed social science priorities, the RAE, the ESRC Methods Programme, FP6 and research contracts.

There was considerable concern over plans for 'independent ethical scrutiny' of research proposals, lest a medical model of ethical rules be applied inappropriately to social science research practice. It was agreed that a collective social science perspective and voice needed to be mobilised quickly. Further action on research governance is planned, including a scoping exercise and the identification of individuals to lead this work in the coming months. Societies and Associations can assist with this campaign; especially those with well developed ethical codes.

News from our Seminar Series

Following the visit of an Academy team to the European Commission to discuss the developing European research strategy, we held a seminar in May, entitled 'Making the European

Move: the New instruments in FP6'. The seminar, sponsored by the ESRC, was well attended and earned high praise from the participants. The seminar comprised informative talks by a panel of speakers: Ian Forbes from the Academy (as the designated 'information multiplier'(!) for FP6 in the UK), Nikolaos Kastrinos (DG Research, European Commission), Clair Watts (UKRO), and Stephen Struthers (ESRC). The afternoon proceeded with discussions on the themes of: the new politics of FP funding; the Big Idea; practical changes; the new thematic priorities and the two new funding tools – Networks of Excellence and Integrated Programmes. A final session and panel discussion concluded by offering advice on how to get money from FP6 and the potential obstacles.

The most important message of the seminar was that the social sciences needed to make strenuous efforts to take advantage of

the new arrangements. A report of the seminar (with thanks to Sally Hardy) will soon be available on our web site: www.the-academy.org.uk.

Commission on the Social Sciences

Progress on the Commission's work has accelerated since the employment of Katherine Hamilton as Secretary to the Commission. Kathy's contract has been extended for a further three months to help complete the work. The Commission is still keen to hear from all members on matters that concern the future of the social sciences. Evidence-based material is especially welcome.

To make a submission, email K.L.Hamilton@city.ac.uk. The Commission web site contains some of the materials and position papers that are informing current thinking. There is a link from the Academy web site at:
www.the-academy.org.uk/index.cfm?fuse=COMMISSION

News from Academy Council

- Sara Delamont's proposal to organise specialist social science training sessions for research supervision and for case studentships was accepted. There will be a discount for junior colleagues proposed by an Academician.
- Council also agreed to Bhikhu Parekh's suggestion to establish a rolling programme of mini-commissions into issues that warrant multi-disciplinary social science attention. A series of 'Committees of Enquiry' will conduct investigations into important issues and publish reports, usually within about three months. Three areas of current importance have been identified: the future of the RAE; the rise of the new right; and political (dis)engagement.

Procedures for requesting funding

The Academy encourages its members to organise events that address pressing policy concerns from a social science perspective, and that tackle the way policy affects research and practice in the social sciences. The Academy will consider funding proposals on a range of activities, including working parties, consultative panels,

seminars and meetings. Decisions on applications for support are made on behalf of Council by a subcommittee consisting of the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer and one other Council member. Documents setting out the Academy policy on supporting meetings and activities, a guide on how to organise an event and application support forms are all available from the Academy office. Please email admin@the-academy.org.uk or phone 020 7468 2296 with your postal details to request these documents.

Review of the ESRC's Virtual College System (VCS)

VCS sought to enable the academic community to assist in the shaping of the Council's policies, practices and new research developments, and contribute to the direct assessment of Research Grant applications. The review found that it was broadly successful on new developments and dealing quickly and effectively with applications, but had little impact on Council's policies. It was also noted that the Colleges lack widespread visibility within the academic community.

In addressing the conclusions of the review, the ESRC will, among other things, relaunch the VCS, improve its induction materials and produce a structured timetable for new activities. The next major task is to improve the throughput and volume of small grants applications to College members.

Academician Nominations

Nominations for Academicians are being accepted for the second round of the year until the end of August. Academicians are entitled to make one nomination per year. Societies and Associations can make up to six recommendations. The nominating procedure has been simplified - the Nominations Committee requires the agreement of the nominee, a paragraph explaining the reasons for nominating the person, and a recent c.v. of the nominee. New Academicians will be inaugurated at a special Dinner in the autumn.

Other news

Libby Langley leaves the Academy next week. Council is grateful for the contribution that she has made to the Academy, and wishes her well.

Coming Soon!

A new survey of Academicians is in preparation. The survey will enable the Academy to be better informed about the activities and interests of members, and will be used to develop Academy services.