

The Commission Reports

Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, launched *Great Expectations*, the long awaited report of the Commission on the Social Sciences on March 25, before an invited audience of social scientists scholars and practitioners. Having warmly welcomed the report, he went out of his way to underscore the important contribution that the social sciences make to society.

Commission Chair, Professor David Rhind CBE FRS, thanked his fellow commissioners, and the Secretary, Kathy Hamilton, for all their hard work. He emphasised the diversity and strength of the social sciences, and pointed out that the sixty recommendations addressed to a variety of key actors. He congratulated the Academy for proposing the Commission, and suggested that the exercise should be repeated at some time in the future.

The reception of the report has been very positive. EC Research Commissioner Philippe Busquin has written a letter of thanks to David Rhind. He notes that the report is 'an extremely comprehensive and rich document'. In his view, 'the considerations concerning the quality of research, the impact of social sciences research, its role in support of policy-making including business life, the quality and quantity of both staff and students are all of great interest'. Specifically, the 'analysis of the internationalisation of research, of multidisciplinary working and of international collaboration will be', he added, 'of particular interest to myself and to my services'.

The large number of requests for a copy of the report testifies to the interest that it has generated. At the recent AGM, it was agreed that David Rhind and his team were to be congratulated on the quality and depth of the report, and thanked for all their hard work.

For its part, the Academy is determined to see that the recommendations are addressed with appropriate seriousness. Council is developing an action plan for the medium and long term. One of the first things to be done is produce a shorter version for wider transmission. This will be produced and circulated in the near future.

Council would be delighted to hear of your views on how best to ensure that the report is utilised and its recommendations implemented, and what to prioritise.

AcSS Honours

Congratulations to Professor Gordon Marshall AcSS, who has been made a Commander of the British Empire for his services to higher education.

Meeting with Ian Diamond

Ian Forbes, Chair of the Council, had a very productive meeting with the new Chief Executive of the ESRC recently. The two Ians were colleagues in the Social Science faculty at Southampton, and were able to have a frank discussion about future developments, and the prospects for Academy/ESRC co-operation on issues of common interest. During biannual meetings with Ian Diamond, we will seek to further the interests of the social scientists, and develop the complementary role of the Academy.

The White Paper

Following a very successful consultation exercise, which included a half day conference, the Academy was submitted a detailed response to the White Paper on behalf of the social science community. The prime mover for the Academy was Miriam David, ably assisted by Michael Warren. The key points of our response focused on the importance of diversity, the geographical spread of high quality research and teaching in the UK, and the likely negative impact of concentration.

Education and Skills Secretary Clarke has written to thank the Academy for its response. He promises that our views 'will be taken fully into account', and has informed us that a summary of the main responses will soon be on the DfES website.

The *Guardian* gave excellent coverage of a joint press release from the Academy and ten societies on June 19. Thanks to Jonathan Breckon of the Royal Geographical Society for ensuring that our views are heard.

The final part of this consultation process will be a meeting with the new Minister for HE, Alan Johnson.

Strategic Forum for the Social Sciences

At its most recent meeting, the Report of the Commission on the Social Sciences was discussed at length, and with a great deal of animation. It was encouraging to note that the report was welcomed by all of the representatives of the social sciences present, which includes charitable foundations and practitioners in government.

One of the main items of interest was the relationship between researchers, users and policymakers. It was agreed that, while there are overlapping and common interests, there are areas of real concern, where the parties are at quite a distance. It was also agreed that this situation was both damaging to the social sciences and unnecessary.

Part of the solution is radically to improve communication between researchers and policymakers. The Academy is considering new ways to inform the research community about these problems, and potential solutions.

'One Voice'

Sara Delamont has been championing the One Voice project on the RAE consultation process. The project aims to encourage further co-operation between the social sciences and the humanities.

Starting with only a limited response to early initiatives on this topic, this consultation developed into an extensive process covering a significant number of disciplines. The major learned societies were most likely to have the means to produce

substantive policy responses, and some also make direct representations.

A conference was convened at which useful work had been done to produce an agreed statement of policy. This provided an important service to smaller societies.

The One Voice document is also based on the representations of individuals to the consultation exercise. It is now an authoritative source of the considered views of the social science and humanities community

Current Consultations

The Academy is currently developing responses on a number of issues. In each case, the lead person will be delighted to hear from you, and receive any copies of local and society responses to which you may have access.

1) *ESRC quota awards*

Dominic Abrams collated data and submitted a reply on behalf of the Learned Societies

2) *Roberts Report on the RAE* - Next deadline Sept 30th

Sara Delamont is drafting a submission for circulation. She needs input from societies and Academicians by July 31st.

(delamont@cardiff.ac.uk)

3) *Quality and Standards in Higher Degrees* - Deadline Sept 30th

Sara Delamont is also the lead person for this consultation. Once again, she would like your views by July 31st

4) *QAA - Future of Benchmarking Committee*

This UK committee met for the first time on June 2nd. Major questions under discussion include:

(a) Whether to allow subjects which do not have a set of benchmarks at present (eg, Veterinary Nursing and Criminology) to form a group and produce benchmarks, and under what procedures

(b) Benchmarking taught masters degrees :- some subjects (none in social science) are demanding that benchmarks be produced:

(c) Benchmarking Foundation Degrees

(d) When and how should the 60 sets of benchmarks currently in operation be revisited, revised, and updated?

There is just one social scientist on this committee. Fortunately, it is Sara Delamont, who is, inevitably, very interested in your views. .

Committee Dates for 2003

- Committee of Learned Societies: noon, 23 June
- Academy Council: 2pm, July 7
- Committee of Academicians: 11am, Sept 8
- Nominations Committee: 2 pm, Sept 8
- Academy Council: 2pm, Oct 6
- Committee of Academicians: Dec 8 (tbc)

Membership Surveys

Dominic Abrams' report to the AGM on the recent survey of showed that the Academy has an enthusiastic and potentially active membership, and that there is substantial overlap in the views of Academicians and Learned Societies.

The results showed clearly that the three highest priority items were making recommendations to ESRC, lobbying government and other policy organisations to support the social sciences, and responding to government and research councils.

The next set of priorities was to initiate consultation processes, contribute expertise in consultation exercises, setting up working groups and expert panels and pressing for increased funding for postgraduate students.

Full reports of the findings will be circulated to members.

New Training Programmes

Want high quality training for PhD supervision developed specifically for social scientists? The ESRC has agreed to support a proposal by Sara Delamont AcSS to provide such specialist training in variety of venues across the UK, with preferential arrangements for Academicians who assist her to set up training sessions. The plans also include training in relation CASE studentships, and the Research Councils'

Concordat. Further details will be circulated directly to Academicians and Learned Societies.

The Academy year in brief

In the last year, the Academy has been busier than ever. We have built a reputation for responding to consultation opportunities, successfully filling a long-standing gap in the representation of the social sciences. This part of the Academy's work is increasing rapidly, as more organisations have come to recognise our role.

We have found that it is not unusual for the Academy to be the sole source of social science input to a range of

consultation opportunities. Council has prioritised this work. Since the last AGM, the Academy has responded to the following consultation opportunities (one or more of which you may have contributed to):

- ESRC Research Colleges
- The Quinquennial Review of the Research Councils: Stage 2
- The British Academy review of the current state of postgraduate study in the humanities and social sciences
- The House of Commons Science and Technology review of short term research contracts
- The Joint Funding Bodies' (Roberts) Review of Research Assessment
- Review of Ethics and Social Science Research
- The White Paper on the Future of Higher Education
- The Human Genetics 2003/2005 Work Plan

The Academy has also run seminars that address professional issues for the broad social science community.

- Ethics and Research Guidelines
- EU Framework Programme VI
- Citizenship Education

There has also been a half-day conference on the White Paper, and a joint seminar with the ESRC and the Universities of Kent and Oxford on 'Using Intergroup Contact to Promote Intergroup Harmony'.

Additionally, we have done two consultancies for the ESRC, and have undertaken a major survey of the views and needs of Academicians and Learned Societies. As we analyse the data more thoroughly, we will use the information you have supplied to improve our services to you, and more actively defend and promote the social sciences.

In memoriam

It is with great sorrow that we report the untimely death of Professor Colin Bell AcSS FRSE, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Stirling University, and a distinguished member of the social sciences community.