

Academy Outreach

Members of Council have been busy promoting the social sciences in a series of meetings with key institutions and individuals in the past months. Our President, Lord Parekh, and Dominic Abrams (Chair, Learned Societies Committee), met with Lord Runciman, President of the British Academy, to foster good relations between the two Academies. Bhikhu Parekh, who was elected FBA some time after he achieved Academician status, is keen for joint activities to be developed, in order to capitalise on the energy of our Academy and the physical resources of the BA for the benefit of the social sciences, and to address issues of social importance.

Council Chair Ian Forbes has been raising the profile of the Academy in meetings with Geoffrey Crosschalk of the AHRB, Sue Duncan AcSS, the Government's Chief Social Researcher, and David King, the Government's Chief Scientist. He also visited the Royal Society to discuss matters of mutual interest with Dr Peter Collins, the Director of Science Policy, and Dr David Stewart Boak, the Communications Director. Further meetings are planned with key Research Directors in Whitehall.

These meetings revealed a high awareness of the existence of the Academy, as well as support for its aims, interest in our plans for the future and a willingness to work with the Academy. It is encouraging to report a general recognition that the social sciences have a vital role in relation to policy making and public understanding.

While there is anecdotal evidence that social science is taken more seriously, this good news should be put into context. There is a long way to go before good social science input is routinely employed in a timely way. Also, there is a danger that the demands on social science could exceed reasonable expectations of what can be delivered, and when.

Moving the Web

Thanks to Taylor and Francis, who have kindly agreed to host our new website.

A new Social Science Journal

Joe Campling reported to the AGM on her negotiations with publishers, which have been very positive. She expects to have a deal for an innovative and interdisciplinary social science journal in place before the end of the year.

New Priorities for the Social Sciences

The Academy has been invited to make a special contribution to the ESRC consultation on its future priorities. Ian Diamond AcSS has written to the Chair of Council, saying he is keen for the Academy to provide key input in relation to capacity – 'ensuring the ability for the UK to undertake top class social science' – and research – 'cutting edge and excellent research in both response and directed modes'. What, he wants to know, are the main achievements of social science research in the last ten years? What are the most exciting intellectual challenges? We will be contacting all our Academicians to glean their views on these questions. The views of both scholar and practitioner Academicians will be vital to this process. Seminars will also be organised to develop the Academy's views.

This will be an iterative process, during which time there will be opportunities to meet with key figures in the ESRC, in order to identify, to be informed of and to discuss emerging issues. These activities will be supported by funds from the ESRC. The Academy will submit its views in written form, and has also been invited to present its views to the ESRC senior management at the end of the consultation period.

At our AGM, Adrian Alsop provided further details of this serious consultation opportunity, with implications for the direction and future of social science not just in the higher education sector, but for society as a whole. All members are urged to contribute to this process.

Whose Ethics?

The development and implementation of the NHS Research Governance Framework has profound and, for many social scientists, worrying implications. New NHS rules governing ethical approval for all research involving human subjects may be imposed across the board. These rules are based on a medical model of research, where the double blind model of scientific enquiry is seen as the gold standard for all research. Medical and health-related research practice has for some time been associated with quite stern tests of ethical validity, and research activity is heavily policed by a combination of strict procedures and powerful oversight committees. There is no doubt that this level of surveillance is appropriate wherever there is the possibility of harm being caused, and wherever the human subjects are drawn from groups with identifiable vulnerabilities.

Social science research involving human subjects, by contrast, uses a wide variety of methods, often with groups that can hardly be considered vulnerable. Consider, for example, research on political leaders, or on managers of public companies, or on a contemporary social and political theorist. Is a formal procedure really needed to govern the activity of an academic social scientist in such areas? A framework that regarded such human subjects as deserving of automatic protection, on ethical grounds, against academic enquiry would pose severe restrictions, and create a damaging imbalance between academic research and freelance and journalistic enquiry. Yet reports are growing of medical ethics committees vetoing high quality social science research proposals because they do not conform to the medical model.

The Academy is concerned that this one form of ethical review will be extended without good cause, and without due weight given to existing professional standards of social science research, the current high standard of which is maintained and monitored through existing practices, training and the peer review mechanism. Moreover, there is, so far, a lack of evidence of the harm that social science research causes; nor is there evidence that the new

controls are proportionate to the risk of damage to subjects.

Furthermore, there has yet to be a proper consideration of the balance between protection of subjects and other ethical principles, such as public interest or freedom of scientific inquiry.

The Strategic Forum on the Social Sciences is soon to receive a report on the extension of ethical review procedures in relation to social science. In its discussions thus far, the Academy has sought to defend the autonomy of social science research practices against any unjustified encroachment, while being supportive of appropriate standards. Ian Forbes would welcome your views on this subject (ian.forbes@nottingham.ac.uk).

New Seminar Series on the Family

The ESRC has just awarded a seminar series on *The Family, Community and Social Change: Looking Back and Moving Forward* to Ros Edwards at South Bank University, in conjunction with the Academy. The Academy will provide assistance with publicity, dissemination and access to interested Academicians. Further information will be circulated in the near future.

Honour for Academician

Geoffrey Harcourt AcSS, Emeritus Professor of Economics at Jesus College, Cambridge, has been nominated as the 2004 Distinguished Fellow of the History of Economic Society, for 'lifetime accomplishment in the history of economics'. He joins a long list of renowned economists including Hayek, Stigler, Robbins, Shackle and Robinson. In further recognition of his distinguished contributions, the title of Honorary Member has been bestowed on him by the Council of the European Society for the History of Economic Thought. Geoff joins only five others, including Marc Blaug, who have been honoured in this way.

Metrics of Quality?

At an ESRC seminar new evidence was presented of the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches to the measurement of research performance using social science bibliometrics. The possibility of the introduction of metrics as part of the measurement of quality in the next RAE was reported in the November 2002 issue of the *Bulletin*, following a meeting with Gareth Roberts. Since then, members of the Academy have been keen to insist upon a proper discussion about metrics, and the need to ensure that any metrics proposed for the next RAE are properly grounded in social science research.

The bulk of the new evidence has been produced by the Centre of Science and Technology Studies at Leiden University, with additional data provided by Evidence Ltd, specialists in research performance analysis. In brief, the problems of using varieties of citation measurement techniques are confirmed. Social science research covers a wide spectrum, from some aspects of psychology with a strongly scientific flavour, to public administration where arts-style research is much more common. Social science research as a whole is much more likely to produce and refer to books and chapters in books than articles, compared to its natural science counterparts; qualitative material appears more often in books, while qualitative research output is more likely to be in articles.

In the social sciences, national and regional topics may be just as crucial as 'international' research. Moreover, reports and consultations are the appropriate product of research commissioned to address a pressing policy problem. Both of these factors can produce the highest quality research, with high social value. However, because this kind of output does not usually appear in the top level, international, peer-reviewed journals, citation and impact studies will fail to recognise or will at least seriously underestimate a significant segment of social science research. Other differences stem from the ubiquity of the single scholar in the social sciences. The data shows that such scholars produce

a great deal less in the way of quantity than 'team-oriented' scientists. In what may be an indication of qualitative difference, social science research has much greater longevity. Our output may still be cited up to thirty years after publication, in contrast to the four years that is standard in the natural sciences.

The major weakness of existing bibliometric measures is the domination of US social science. This is plain from the bias against many important European social science journals, which do not appear on ISI Citation Index lists. Added to this is the 'home' advantage enjoyed by US academics, whose writing on parochial US topics regularly manages to find its way into the top journals as internationally important research. Notwithstanding these biases, UK social science research output emerges as second in the (albeit flawed) international rankings derived from this data.

An even more serious problem is the wide range of 'non-serial' publications and output. While books and chapters in books could technically (with the benefit of huge investment) be included in citation indices in the future, this is never going to be case with grey literature, where some of the most telling and influential research is published. As far as evaluation of research performance is concerned, this material requires quite new impact measures.

Other evidence presented to the seminar revealed the sharp differences in the citation practices between the social science disciplines, and the way that some disciplines form natural groupings in terms of their output profile. It was striking that there was very little similarity of these groupings and HEFCE's suggested composition of the new panels.

In sum, if metrics are to be introduced, then such a policy should be agreed in advance with the diverse communities of scholars affected, and used only within strict limits and in conjunction with other, reliable means of assessment.

Meeting Dates

- Nominations Committee: June 28
- Academy Council: July 5, Oct 4
- Committee of Academicians: June 22
- Nominations Committee: June 28, Sept 6
- President's Lunch: November 24

Completed Consultations

The Committees of Academicians and Learned Societies collated responses and sent in submissions in relation to:

- . OST consultation of the Fellowships Scheme for new scholars
- . Review of ESRC Allocation of Studentship Awards
- . HEFCE Review of the Research Funding Method

With thanks

Council said goodbye to three members, who have completed their term of office.

- Peter Glasner has served as Treasurer for the past three years, and has ensured that the Academy is on a sound financial footing. His previous experience, included his time as Chair of ALSISS, made his contributions particularly valuable. He will be sorely missed.
- Nigel Gilbert is also retiring from the Council. Nigel has made a massive contribution to the formation and development of the Academy, especially as the Chair of the ALSISS Implementation Group, which took the idea of the Academy and made it a reality. Since the inauguration of the Academy, Nigel has been a driving and innovative force. His energy and vision as an Academician will, it is hoped, continue to animate the Academy.
- Stina Lyon is a past Treasurer of both the Academy and ALSISS. In these roles, and in other ways, such as an organiser of some of the Academy's seminars, she has made enormous efforts on behalf of the social sciences. Her continued enthusiasm for the Academy is a reminder of the quality of her contribution over the years, and how it will be missed on Council.

Tax Relief

Members may now claim tax relief on their subscription, from April 2002.
Quote reference SAPP/T1644/2002/JEM.

Academy Elections

David Turner will shortly be conducting Elections of members to the Committees of Academicians and Learned Societies, Council and the Nominations Committee. Nominations should be sent to him at dturner@glam.ac.uk.

Current Committee memberships are below. While some members will be standing again, there will be vacancies on Council and all the Committees.

Council

Dominic Abrams, Bhikhu Parekh (President, ex-officio), Dianne Berry, Miriam David, Sara Delamont, Mark Easterby-Smith, Ian Forbes (Chair), Sally Hardy, Jean Martin, Henrietta Moore, David Turner (Secretary).

Committee of Academicians

Peter Batey, Bob Blackburn, Miriam David (Chair), Philip Davies, Howard Elcock, Kenneth Dyson, Jean Martin, Doreen Massey, Richard Munton, Eliot Stern, Arlene Vetere

Committee of Learned Societies

Dominic Abrams (Chair), Janet Ashkam, Alison Assiter, Joe Bailey, Kay Biscomb, Graham Clarke, Michael Crossley, Kate Davidson, Wyn Grant, Sally Hardy, Carol Lewis, Geoff Payne, Helen Simmons, Nigel Thrift, Robert Upton

Nominations Committee

Dominic Abrams, Alison Assiter, Miriam David, Sara Delamont, Ian Forbes (Chair), Anthea Tinker, Arlene Vetere, plus four vacancies

More Honours

Congratulations to Michael Batty CBE, and Peter Roberts OBE, whose services have been recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Lawrence Freedman, Will Hutton, Tony Giddens, Fred Halliday, Peter Hennessy, Julian Le Grand and Bhikhu Parekh are our Academicians on *Prospect's* list of the Top 100 British Public Intellectuals.