



AHRC's future priorities

1. What in your view should AHRC's priorities be?

The AHRC funds PhDs, fellowships, research networks and research projects. For each of these, some are responsive, in which students/academics design their own research projects, and some are hypothecated, in which the project is broadly set by the AHRC or UKRI, or else collaborative with partners external to the university. The BPA will comment on each of these:

PhD funding schemes involving partners outside Universities are frequently less relevant to philosophy students due to the highly theoretical nature of the discipline. That is not to deny that such schemes are very welcome, indeed perhaps even essential, to maintaining feasible levels of funding PhDs in the humanities. **It is vital for the AHRC to maintain responsive mode funding for PhD students**, not just to ensure more traditional subjects like Philosophy can attract a suitable number of PhD students to ensure the health of the discipline, but also because we know that there is particular value in researchers (PhD students) deciding the nature of their own project. We recognise that there is a slight possibility that research might become skewed by being only in the responsive mode, in a way that could erode the existence of a vitally broad research base, but even accepting that possibility, **we think that it is more likely that maintaining strong responsive mode funding for PhDs will help sustain a broad research base**. It is frequently difficult to know what practical benefits will derive from basic research. Early developers of logic probably did not foresee its power in computation nor the power and changes in society that computation would bring. Allowing academics to carry out research in areas that, informed by their expertise, they see as valuable and productive has proven to produce world-leading theoretical and practical results, and we must ensure that is allowed to happen.

The BPA are concerned that the block grant doctoral training partnership funding schemes are inefficient. We can see the case for the AHRC wanting to offload the administrative labour to the universities, but it seems to have been done at the price of multiplying the administrative costs enormously in the aggregate work that is put into running and maintaining the BGPs. It seems likely that more PhDs could have been funded were these costs kept to a minimum. We urge the AHRC to conduct an audit on the total cost of compliance with the DTP scheme, as HEFCE/REF did and does for the cost to universities of carrying out the REF.

In providing funding for fellowships, research networks and research projects, the AHRC must protect responsive mode schemes. **The BPA believe that it is vital that the AHRC continue to fund as much research as possible in the responsive mode for the reasons given above.** We believe that maintaining responsive funding schemes is exactly the strategy that is vital for philosophy to thrive and to maintain its world-leading position. The best research typically comes from academics responding to questions raised by developments within and between disciplines. We recognise that many important questions are raised by external/broader developments, but where these are important and academics (including philosophers) can contribute, there is no lack of will to do so. The rise and success of feminist philosophy is a good example of that, as a current example is the fact that philosophers are responding to issues connected with 'post-truth'. We believe that themed and directed funding should be used in those special cases where there are particular reasons to think that this kind of research will not happen as a matter of course.

Out of the three schemes (fellowships, networks and projects), **the BPA place most importance on fellowships** for philosophy. Enabling researchers to have the time they need, unencumbered by teaching and administrative responsibilities, is the most valuable resource for philosophers.

Considering network and project funding, **the BPA believe that the AHRC's priority should be to find more ways to make these resources go further than they currently do in funding research.** Project grants fund researcher time on a directly allocated funding model. In practice, when the proportion of time

is less than the researcher's nominal time for research, universities rarely release any additional time for research, and rarely allow researchers to cost for more than that amount of time. If, in contrast, researchers could cost for teaching buy-out, it would release additional time for them to do research in a relatively inexpensive way, at the same time as creating jobs for junior colleagues. **We note the success, popularity and importance of the six months (50/50) matched funding for sabbatical leave scheme started by the ARHB.** This was a successful model for funding since converting a period of six months' leave into a year's leave results in proportionally more and better work. It was popular because for many academics the two to three year schemes are too long or appear too demanding, whereas the six month scheme was more manageable. And the scheme was important to philosophy since proportionally the funding was shared more evenly amongst more academics across more departments, rather than larger amounts from larger schemes going to the smaller numbers of academics in fewer departments. **In terms of the quality of the research produced and the consequent international reputation of arts and humanities research in the UK, the matched leave scheme started by the AHRB was the single most effective use of money there has been.**

As a general recommendation for considering its priorities, **we recommend that the AHRC's Director of Research or Chief Executive meets with PVCs of Research from universities around the UK**, to help the AHRC to be in tune with universities' research office priorities. The AHRC is part of the wider research ecosystem in the UK such that it needs to engage in regular dialogue not only with learned societies and subject associations but with universities' senior management, to understand what their universities need and the ways in which they are constrained by other external drivers.

Responding to a changing landscape

9. How fundamentally is the emphasis on collaboration with non-academic partners and interdisciplinarity changing the research landscape? What are the opportunities/challenges here?

The BPA believe that too much emphasis on collaboration is in danger of changing the research landscape significantly, and it should be encouraged carefully. Philosophy is a part of the humanities but its importance extends into many other areas of intellectual enquiry, and while we recognise the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration for philosophy it should not be allowed to overshadow the need to fund basic research. We also recognise the concomitant risk, in increasingly encouraging collaboration with non-academic partners, of instrumentalising those partners' contributions.

AHRC's role in supporting communication, engagement and impact

The BPA believe that funding good engagement and impact is worthwhile, but that the AHRC should not allow them to dominate core research. Public communication, engagement and impact should not be a factor in selecting projects to fund under the principal responsive mode schemes. **We are committed to the view that basic academic research benefits a society, independent of any developed programme of research impact.** We believe there should be separate funding schemes for engagement and impact, either as add-on to projects that can have impact, or as follow-on funding, or as a scheme to support impact-directed research (referred to as 'translational research' in medicine and elsewhere). Furthermore, in cases where the government identifies certain topics –including topics in the Arts and Humanities– as needing research for national or governmental reasons, we believe it should commission that research through distinct departmental budgets.