



MINUTES

Meeting of History UK, 13 March 2023, 11:00 via Teams

Present: Antonio Sennis (Co-Convenor, UCL); Sarah Holland (Co-Convenor, Nottingham); Grainne Goodwin (Secretary, Leeds Beckett); Sara Barker (Research Officer, Leeds); Coreen McGuire (EDI Officer, Durham); Ruth Atherton (South Wales); Inge Dornan (Brunel); Anna Plassart (OU); Fabian Hilfrich (Edinburgh); Karen Jones (Kent); Deborah Sutton (Lancaster); Sarah Crook (Swansea); Tim Reinke-Williams (Northampton); Daniel Laqua (Northumbria); Helen Birkett (Exeter); Sophie Brockmann (De Montfort); Jo Coburn (Lincoln); Shaun Evans (Bangor); Andy Gritt (Nottingham Trent); Simon Mills (Newcastle); Elizabeth New (Aberystwyth); Christian O'Connell (Gloucestershire).

Apologies: Simon Peplow (ECR, Warwick); Richard Hawkins (Treasurer, Wolverhampton); Manuela Williams (Communications Officer, Strathclyde); Tim Grady (Chester); Andrew Jotischky (Royal Holloway); Deborah Toner (Leicester); Heidi Merkhens (Aberdeen); Bronach Kane (Cardiff); Jessica Sharkey (East Anglia); Kate Ballantyne (Liverpool John Moore).

1. Co-convenors' Report

1.1. Update on co-convenors positions

The meeting approved Sarah Holland's move from Education Officer to her new role as HUK co-convenor alongside Antonio Sennis, after Yolana Pringle stepped down at the end of 2022. Sarah and Antonio thanked Yolana for her work over recent years as co-convenor and her assistance in guiding the smooth transition to a new co-chair. Antonio also notified the committee that he will be appointed Head of Department at UCL from September 2023 and for the SC to consider any implications this may have in terms of conflict of interests between his new senior management role and his co-convenor commitments and advocacy for HUK. Meeting attendees did not see this new position as a problem for HUK's activities and initiatives.

1.2. HUK condolences

Antonio conveyed the sad news that serving SC member Margaret Small, the representative from Birmingham, passed away recently. Antonio has been in touch with Matt Holbrook about any commemoration for Margaret which HUK might be part of and the SC extended condolences to her family and colleagues.

1.3. HUK History collaborations and updates

Antonio and Sarah attended meetings with History organisations the Royal Historical Society, Institute for Historical Research, the Historical Association, the IHR Advisory Council and the Arts and Humanities Alliance. The focus of these meetings was working to coordinate efforts across the various History bodies and collaborate on projects were practicable. Shared areas of interest include advocacy

for history, the EDI agenda, links with teachers and lobbying for history curriculum reform, and defence of the humanities more broadly. Sarah and Antonio noted a number of headlines from their discussions, including that the RHS under Emma Griffin's leadership had become more vociferous and interventionist on History's behalf, the IHR were attempting to become less London-centric by moving into departmental spaces and common rooms across the country and doing work on precarity with History Lab Plus. Antoni remarked that the AHA was in a transitional period in terms of its online visibility and charity status and the mood at its conference was one of solidarity in the face of the humanities under attack.

The main discussion point which arose from these conversations was thinking through what was unique about HUK's activities and identifying key areas of work. Discussants felt these were principally activities around cuts and closures and protecting staff; working with schools and teachers to make history more appealing - can we as an organisation influence or assist with the creation of the curriculum?; enhancing the connections between secondary and tertiary education; convincing applicants, students and their wider social networks of the value and relevance of studying History and debunking myths about lack of employability (by using [SHAPE](#) data or our own recent report, for example); and promoting a proactive narrative around History rather than reacting to negativity and thus broadening the public constituency interested in the subject. Efforts to seek HUK representation in all History departments across the UK, to think about Historians working in non-historical departments as well as independent historians was also considered to make HUK as representative and inclusive in its membership as possible.

2. Confirmation of new and second-tenure members

The meeting welcomed new committee members in lieu of the AGM. We are delighted to receive into the SC ranks Kate Ballantyne (Liverpool John Moore), Helen Birkett (Exeter); Sophie Brockmann (De Montfort); Jo Coburn (Lincoln); Shaun Evans (Bangor); Andy Gritt (Nottingham Trent); Simon Mills (Newcastle); Elizabeth New (Aberystwyth); Christian O'Connell (Gloucestershire) and Jessica Sharkey (East Anglia).

New members spoke about their interests in and commitments to EDI, decolonising the curriculum, skills and competencies agenda, History in education, research and career development, alliances with the heritage and archival sector, advocacy for History and the humanities and social sciences in general, sustainability, school outreach, digitisation and the interface with AI, public engagement, and student attendance.

As well as new members enriching the SC, thanks were offered to current members Sara Barker (Leeds), Bronach Kane (Cardiff), Robert McNamara (Ulster), Inge Dornan (Brunel), Tracey Loughran (Essex) and Heidi Mehrkens (Aberdeen), who have agreed to extend their service to a second term on the committee. Thanks were also offered to Yolana Pringle, Jamie Wood, Eruyn Roberts, Liz Tingle and Christienna Fryar who have stood down from the SC.

3. Officer Vacancies

There are two positions to be filled in the coming months:

Education Officer – Sarah Holland is seeking a replacement to her role as Education officer, which entails providing updates on what is going on in HE as well as organising events on areas such as assessment and engagement.

Early Career Research Officer – Simon Peplow will be stepping down as officer for ECR. The role involves organising the job bootcamp and reporting back on all issues of ECR. This a distinctive aspect of HUK work and expressions of interest to shadow Simon initially before shaping the role going forward are welcome.

4. Officer Reports

Treasurer – As Richard Hawkins sent his apologies this will be updated at the next meeting.

Research – Sara Barker identified three areas of upcoming activity:

- 1) Historians in the Media initiative – after consultation with Catherine Fletcher (MMU) Sara suggested that a package of resources would be more helpful than a specific one off event as it can reach a greater number of people and evolve over time. This might include introduction to types of media work and tailored advice (broadcast online or print media, documentaries, trade publications), why the media needs historians, the realities of freelancing, and practicalities of contracts, payment and invoicing. Sara welcomes expressions of interest to work on these resources with a view to launching online in the summer.
- 2) Establishing a Writing group – to enable research Sara has suggested some small writing group could meet online, taking place three times a year. Tim Reinke-Williams asked about the organisation of the group(s) and Sara noted the composition may vary depending on interest according to similar periods, themes, or whether to mix up participants depending on career stages. Expressions of interest to work out the parameters and get the initiative off the ground are welcome.
- 3) Plans are underway to consider an event/resources on individual research planning, bidding and grant development for all career stages.

Education – Sarah Holland briefed the SC on the assessment event that took place in summer 2022 where UK and North American academics gathered to discuss employment-related and creative assessment and the impact of the pandemic on assessment. A working group on assessment was formed as a result and any SC members interested in exploring assessment and wishing to contribute to the group should contact Sarah. Sarah has also been working on the HUK EDI report with Adam Budd (Edinburgh) and a draft on this should be ready for circulation and initial comment in late spring. Finally, Sarah has been working with Sarah Jones (Bristol) on the Pedagogy Forum launched in January 2023. Two sessions have taken place so far, the first reflecting on the new normal and state of the discipline and another on engagement. This has led to another suggested session on what engagement looks like and what do History students understand by engagement. Future sessions are also in the pipeline on digital literacy and the use of AI, but further suggestions on topics or expression of interest are welcome.

ECR – Simon Peplow reported that the Job Bootcamp ran in September and received very positive feedback. Attendees were fulsome in their praise for the usefulness of the event and the time and feedback colleagues invested in it. A participant reflection is available to read on the HUK website.

EDI – Coreen McGuire reported on the work she has been doing on students with neurodiversity studying History. It was noted that although learning resources are available to neurodivergent students these were often basic and generic, and these needed to be tailored to the subject area and suitable to students studying at this level. Coreen suggested three ways to think about engaging neurodivergent students:

- 1) To embrace multisensory teaching and learning techniques, such as using audio as well as writing, for example, to promote active and small group learning, using peer-to-peer learning.
- 2) Memory links with objects was championed as a way to stimulate student engagement, so embracing the material turn in the classroom and moving out into the built environment or on field trips.
- 3) Neurodivergent students were skilled at making connections between topics but sometimes jumped to conclusions, so ways in which students have to ‘show their working out’ should be encouraged in assigning tasks and assessments.

Communications – Manuela Williams has been setting up a working group on History students’ employability with the remit to explore existing history skills, employability initiatives in UK universities and beyond, and to suggest ways HUK can advise on employability. This may lead to a national employability framework which would be disseminated to sector partners and universities. The working group hopes to meet later this spring and are in the process of agreeing a date for the first meeting. Manuela is also drafting HUK’s social media policy using a template from the Charity Commission and aligning that with our principles. In order to do this, she asks if anyone knows of any paperwork from HUK’s early days and establishment can they please let her know.

5. Update from institutions

Discussion in the meeting addressed the following concerns:

Budget cuts – a number of institutions feel that these are in offing sometimes under the guise of efficiency or feasibility reviews. These have direct impact on the replacement of staff or recruitment of new ones. In some cases, these are linked to inflationary overheads or poor central management and in others to downward student recruitment.

Student Recruitment – there was a consensus that undergraduate student numbers have not bounced back to 2018/2019 levels. There were mixed accounts of post-graduate recruitment with some strong international recruitment, whilst others expressed difficulties recruiting internationally. Even where recruitment was buoyant concerns were expressed that in order to deal with student numbers staff were on short-term contracts rather than being made permanent.

Industrial action – SC members reflected on the various responses in their departments to UCU action. This varied according to size and strength of union branch and which part of the campaign colleagues were most taxed by, with some suggesting a difference in response in pre- and post-92 institutions depending on the emphasis on pay, precarity and pensions. The hostility of management in some universities was also noted.

6. Other projects

As well as expressions of interest in the HUK officer positions and incentives noted above (Assessment working group, Historians in the Media, Research Writing Group), Daniel Laqua introduced a project to evaluate experiential learning in history (the value of knowledge exchanges, field trips, etc). He is interested in HUK participation in an event in June/July hosted in person at Northumbria and welcomed contributions and interest from SC members. Contact Sarah Holland, Simon Peplow, Sara Barker or Daniel Laqua if you would like to be involved in any of these roles and activities.

7. AOB/ Date of next meeting