

historyUK

MINUTES

Meeting of History UK, 20 June 2023, 14:00 via Teams

Present: Antonio Sennis (Co-Convenor, UCL); Sarah Holland (Co-Convenor, Nottingham); Grainne Goodwin (Secretary, Leeds Beckett); Coreen McGuire (Teaching Officer, Durham); Simon Peplow (ECR, Warwick); Richard Hawkins (Treasurer, Wolverhampton); Manuela Williams (Communications Officer, Strathclyde); Andrew Jotischky (Royal Holloway); Deborah Toner (Leicester); Heidi Merkhens (Aberdeen); Kate Ballantyne (Liverpool John Moore); Anna Plassart (Open University); Deborah Sutton (Lancaster); Tim Reinke-Williams (Northampton); Daniel Laqua (Northumbria); Jon Coburn (Lincoln); Deborah Toner (Leicester); Shaun Evans (Bangor); Andy Gritt (Nottingham Trent); Adrian Howkins (Bristol); Siobhan Talbott (Keele); Christian O'Connell (Gloucestershire); Alexander Titov (Queens, Belfast); Stewart McCain (St. Marys).

Apologies: Sara Barker (Research Officer, Leeds); Ruth Atherton (South Wales); Ross Balzaretto (Nottingham); Helen Birkett (Exeter); Leanne Calvert (Hertfordshire); Sarah Crook (Swansea); Tim Grady (Chester); Fabian Hilfrich (Edinburgh); Karen Jones (Kent); Simon Mills (Newcastle).

1. Co-Convenors' report

1.1 Membership of History UK

The co-convenors and secretary are working through membership lists to see which institutions with History provision are absent from steering committee representation and plan to email them directly to invite them to join. Ideally, historians working in non-History departments where History has been absorbed or is represented in a cognisant discipline could also be invited to join History UK; the challenge with this extension of membership may be that local knowledge is required, so if anyone knows a small History team under the umbrella of another department please let Grainne Goodwin know at g.goodwin@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

1.2 Update on Working Groups

- Advocating for the Discipline: the Value of History, and Assessment working groups

Both working groups are due to meet on 21 June for the first time to set up aims and objectives. The groups will use this an opportunity to think about what HUK can do in these respective areas and evaluate the skill sets various members of the groups can bring. There was significant interest in the Assessment group so we are pleased to be able to consult a wide range of expertise from different institutions.

- Working with Schools working group

Sarah Holland (SH) contacted all those who had expressed initial interest in this group in July 2022, but a general call will be circulated to the committee in due course to garner most recent expressions of interest. It is anticipated that there will be some crossover in the remit of this group and the Advocating for the Discipline team.

1.3 HUK collaborations and sector networks

Antonio Sennis (AS) attended the latest Arts and Humanities Alliance Meeting which addressed the health of our disciplines. Foremost amongst discussions were issues at Brighton, UAE and Kent where, at all three institutions, History has been threatened with cuts. AS reported that at some universities “efficiencies” were being proposed across the board, or by faculty or at professorial level. He fed back that proposed cuts could escalate very quickly and were often no reflection on a History department’s performance or research standing.

The [Royal Historical Society’s recent statement](#) on the challenges to History in HE was noted and it was felt that History UK should offer a statement of solidarity with colleagues at the University of Kent. Manuel Williams (MW) will work with the co-convenors on a communication from History UK to voice our support.

Other news from the Arts and Humanities Alliance pertained to the organisation’s [new website](#) and to efforts by English colleagues in the Alliance to work with a communications and PR company [Campaign Collective](#) who have championed institutions, education, and charities to work on strategies to lobby for the sector. We will monitor this to see what impact it has on the health of the English subject area and if such a coordinated strategy is appropriate for History.

1.4 The HUK Constitution

Although the constitution was updated recently, the pandemic has disrupted some of HUK’s processes, such as a meeting in person. Although meeting online facilitates History UK committee members to meet in an efficient and accessible way virtually it was mooted that a return to some in person business would be welcome. The general consensus on this issue suggested that an annual meeting combined with a workshop or conference would be a productive event. This might be themed around the activities of one of HUK’s working groups, aligned with HUK’s principles or address a current challenge in the sector such as the use of AI or student engagement. It was felt this would be conducive to having in depth conversations, networking and collaboration on projects. Thanks to insights from Tim Reinke-Williams (TRW), Daniel Laqua (DL) and Andy Gritt (AG) there were further useful discussions about the timing and moving location of such an event, factoring in busy times of the academic year, preserving accessibility, and work/life balance but the possibilities of an annual meeting will be explored.

1.5 Officer Vacancies

Early Career Researcher Representation - Simon Peplow (SP), the outgoing officer for Early Career Research, pitched the opportunities with this unique HUK role. SP was the first office holder of this role, representing the ECR voice and working on the bootcamp as the highlight of the ECR calendar. He will continue to support this and is happy to advise any incoming representative with a passion for the ECR remit and/or with more recent experience of that career stage. TRW suggested a role-share was also a possibility on this to share commitments or for fresh PhD/ECR experience allied with a more established career historian.

This is a distinctive aspect of HUK, appreciated by ECR participants and a USP for HUK so volunteers interested in taking up this opportunity should contact Simon at Simon.Peplow@warwick.ac.uk

Education – SP has volunteered to take over from SH as the new Education Officer. SP gave his vision of this area of HUK work, focusing on curriculum reform, innovations in assessment, and working with education groups, with the added insight that recent experience from his ECR role would give. We welcome Simon to this position and record our thanks for his commitments to the ECR role.

2 Officers' reports

Treasurer – Apart from tighter bank security over account ownership, Richard Hawkins reported that the organisation has a healthy surplus, which aside from current spending commitments, gave the financial flexibility to support HUK's indicatives.

Research - Sara Barker (SB) was absent but sent a report via SH. Expressions of interest in the historians in the media planning were being followed up. SB had made some progress on the writing group but feels the need to widen interest in a writing group. The remit and makeup of a writing group are still very much open till we have a wider interest base to address questions of grouping and organisation. Any ideas or views on a writing group would be gratefully received.

Education – SH is organising the New to Teaching event with the RHS and planning whether to have this event online or in person. Any views or thoughts on this event please let SH know at Sarah.Holland@nottingham.ac.uk. TRW suggested that despite a shift back to the classroom, distance/online teaching continued to feature in the needs of those new to teaching. Andrew Jotischky raised the important issue of the impact restricted departmental budgets were having on PhD students, whose opportunities to do meaningful teaching were threatened when part-time resourcing was dependent on fluctuating undergraduate recruitment. This effects a whole generation not able to access this valuable teaching experience.

ECR - The main focus for the summer is the job bootcamp. HUK is the only History-facing organisation to run this type of session where candidates can apply for a mock position, submitting a CV and cover letter, undertake a mock interview presentation and then receive feedback. This is a half day event, looking at applications and interviewing applicants. The bootcamp has been pencilled in for early to mid-September 2023 and will be held online so no travel commitments are entailed. SP would welcome volunteers to be on the "employer" panel so get in touch with Simon at Simon.Peplow@warwick.ac.uk

EDI – Coreen McGuire (CMcG) has been working with SH on the Diversity Project. The report for this has been delayed because of the shifting landscape around diversity, but a draft is in preparation and Coreen and Sarah are keen for one or two volunteers to read through the draft at this stage. If you are willing to do so please contact SH at Sarah.Holland@nottingham.ac.uk. CMcG is continuing work on neurodiversity in teaching and is preparing a new primary source module that incorporates theories and approaches to be rolled out at Durham in 2024.

CMcG is also involved in the History Lab Plus event in August but is struggling to get funding for a live transcription so if you know of any pots of EDI money Coreen can apply for, please contact her at Coreen.Macguire@durham.ac.uk

A neurodiversity mentoring network has started for academics who are neurodivergent and paired up with mentors. Significant numbers of ECRs have signed up but the project is still looking for mentors. Mentors do not need to identify as neurodivergent, so more allies/mentors are welcome. If you are interested in participating please contact Louise Creechan at Louise.Creechan@durham.ac.uk

Communications – Manuela Williams (MW) met with the Employability group in April. This first meeting was an opportunity to discuss what different institutions offer, how we conceive of

employability, how to engage students with placements and extra-curricular work as well as setting the parameters and objectives of the group. The group considered Jon Chandler's work on a skills passport for History students, how to signpost skills through the curriculum, and countering dominant narratives about what History graduates do. The group will be working on a policy document to submit to the committee in due course.

MW proposed an employability project for HUK funding which would include a set of podcasts co-created with students at Strathclyde. The students would work with the Employability working group to produce something on History graduates' perspectives, views of staff, and insights from employers/recruiters. The resultant podcasts would be made available through the HUK website and circulated through the steering committee and affiliate Heads of Department.

The issue of employability generated significant debate amongst committee members. The language and terminology used to describe "employability" was considered; are we shifting away from a narrative of employability to skills, do all stakeholders use the same language (graduate outcomes, professional jobs, employment, employability, transferable skills, attributes, competencies) and share its meaning, how does History respond to the discourse around vocational training, is History being shoehorned into non-humanities models of vocational skills do we resist this, and how are negative ideas about History students' employability countered at open days? It was suggested we might think about "skills and destinations" to frame resources as facilitating a series of individual journeys. It was also noted that at institutional level the data on employability fluctuated from year to year so it was difficult to discern patterns in student employability and that deploying the British Academy's work on SHAPE can be useful for challenging public perceptions of History students' employability.

3 Updates from institutions

DL reminded committee members about the forthcoming event on experiential learning at University of Northumbria in conjunction with History UK on 25 July.

The Pedagogy Forum will host the next session in its ongoing programme online on 23 June entitled 'Mind the Gap': Staff Expectations and Student Engagement.

4 AOB

It was decided that if there is the financial capacity in the organisation to support projects and initiatives then formalising this process would be a way forward to channel and promote innovations by creating an application template.

AG suggested one area that HUK could develop was some policy around sustainability in light of the recent QA benchmark statement. The organisation could consider ways to help historians engage with this in a meaningful way and to embed it in curricula. This could be another unique contribution from HUK. SH encouraged the creation of a briefing document and terms of reference on sustainability with a view to circulating this to the steering committee and as a potential area of future work.

5 Date of next meeting

Late Autumn 2023