



**History UK Steering Committee meeting agenda, Spring 2024  
Online 12:00-13:30 13 March, 2024**

**Welcome and apologies**

**Present:** Antonio Sennis (Co-Convenor, UCL); Sarah Holland (Co-Convenor, Nottingham); Grainne Goodwin (Secretary, Leeds Beckett); Liz Egan (ECR, Warwick); Jasper Heinzen (incoming Treasurer, York); Ruth Atherton (South Wales); Inge Dornan (Brunel); Andrew Jotischky (Royal Holloway); Karen Jones (Kent); Ross Balzaretto (Nottingham); Erica Wald (Goldsmiths); Deborah Toner (Leicester); Andrew Roach (Glasgow); Kate Ballantyne (Liverpool John Moore); Daniel Laqua (Northumbria); Helen Birkett (Exeter); Andy Gritt (Nottingham Trent); Tim Reinke-Williams (Northampton);.

**Apologies:** Sara Barker (Research, Leeds); Coreen McGuire (EDI, Durham); Simon Peplow (Education, Warwick); Richard Hawkins (Treasurer, Wolverhampton); Manuela Williams (Communications, Strathclyde); Tracy Loughran (Essex); Deborah Sutton (Lancaster); Heidi Merkhens (Aberdeen); Fabian Hilfrich (Edinburgh); Christian O'Connell (Gloucestershire); Kathy Davies (History Lab+); Martin Farr (Newcastle); Anna Plassart (OU).

**Co-Convenors' report**

- Update from Humanities organisations

Antonio Sennis (AS) updated the committee on discussions with the Humanities Quartet (RHS, IHR, HA and History UK), who have met twice since the last SC meeting to monitor and address the state of History, nationally and locally. The two main issues arising from these meetings were lobbying for History and greater involvement of HUK in Heads of Department meetings.

**Lobbying for History** - AS reported that one of these sessions involved a meeting with Matt Western, shadow Minister for Education. The group identified three key areas for government attention: how financial cuts and political apathy are threatening History in HE; accessibility to the subject from potential students of all backgrounds is at risk; and loss to wider society's understandings of diversity and inequality if the teaching of History is undermined or narrowed. The meeting suggested that there was no money to invest seriously in the discipline, but the minister was receptive to a change in rhetoric which placed the Humanities on the agenda rather than putting the emphasis solely on STEM.

**Head of Department meetings** – AS noted that HUK had been invited to get involved in the biannual online meetings of HoDs run jointly by the RHS and IHR and to co-convene these.

This carves out a space for HUK as a conduit between the two bodies interested in the discipline at large and the departmental side of things, with our organisation positioned as speaking to and for History departments. Tim Reinke-Williams (TRW) noted that this was welcome but also highlighted that this caters to History within a more traditional structural model in which the subject has a dedicated department of its own but this may not fit other institutional frameworks in which History is part of a multi-disciplinary school or cognisant subject area. AS acknowledged that this was an important point and reflected exactly the need for HUK, with its insight from the Steering Committee to speak with and for a constituency of History provision across the country, to have input into these meetings. Our mission should be to go beyond a Russell Group model and speak for all institutions where History is taught.

Andy Gritt (AG) gave his perspective on going to these HoD meetings in the past. He stated that these were once an excellent opportunity for exchange of ideas and views, the perspectives from other HoDs on the challenges being faced were crucial for informing discussions with senior management within your own organisation. Over the last two-three years the meetings have become less frequent and less effective and there is now more emphasis on research and pursuing the agenda of the IHR, rather than broader discipline issues. He also promoted the in-person meetings which offered some really vibrant discussions and the opportunity to network. AS added that if we want to shape the narrative it was imperative that we were there at the table to record and then disseminate the views of HoDs.

Erica Wald (EW) asked for clarification on whether this role would involve co-sharing with the IHR and RHS or did this imply taking over chairing it. AS suggested that HUK would replace the RHS at these meetings with the implication that they would take a leadership role, set the agenda, and co-host the events with the focus on bridging the divide between pre/post-92 provision. Sarah Holland (SH) confirmed that this recalibrated the roles and duties of the History organisations and positioned HUK as very much focused on departmental concerns. Daniel Laqua (DH) welcomed this development as an opportunity to raise the profile of HUK within departments who are not represented on the Steering Committee and whose contact is limited to occasional emails. The committee agreed that we should undertake this activity but ensure that the purpose of each meeting needed to be very clear.

AS also updated the committee on the Arts and Humanities Alliance, in which English, Philosophy and Languages are also represented. He pointed out that English had done a lot of work on the value of their discipline, but there is still a general mood of pessimism with representatives from these subjects, with History being slightly more optimistic about the future. AS also reported on a meeting of the Alliance with Christopher Smith, Executive Chair of the AHRC, still the most poorly funded of the research councils.

- Updates on HUK's working groups

**Advocating for the discipline** - SH noted that this group is linked to all the issues discussed above and is exploring what the remit of this group should be; is it about threats and closures or is it more about a positive message around History, or indeed both? Currently the group is developing resources which can be adapted to different audiences which look at the role of

History in contemporary issues and how to respond to present challenges based on the past. They have also identified communicating with schools, not just about going to university but 'staying in History' through GCSE and A-Level, as a key avenue to raising the profile of History. The cross over with the 'Working with Schools group' on this aspect means it is likely that the latter group will lead on this with involvement from both groups of those interested in it to avoid doubling of work and clarity of message.

**Collaborating with schools** - SH briefed the committee on the recent HUK Pedagogy Forum organised by Sarah Jones, which focused on collaboration between schools and universities. The discussion featured members of the working group including Sarah Longair, David Ingledew, Natasha Hodgson, and Sam Jones. The working group is looking at resources which can bring schoolteachers and academics together. SH issued a call out to members from Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to express interest in the group to ensure a broad regional representation. SH confirmed that this does not necessarily need to be a steering committee member, but anyone teaching History at regional universities.

As part of HUK's Historical Association (HA) representation we have been asked for three key messages which the HE branch of the HA should be communicating to schools about History at university and vice versa. The meeting to discuss this is later today. Messages in the chat pointed to the lack of understanding in schools that History as a subject has changed since many teachers took their degrees and the false perception that studying History doesn't lead to jobs, a theme tackled by our current Employability project. Both misconceptions needed countering. Another point was raised that CPD sessions with teachers had revealed that recent graduate teachers felt that A-Level exam boards were out of touch with the discipline as it is now taught and studied at tertiary level.

**Assessment Project** – SH noted that this group is soon to launch an assessment survey (subject to ethics at the moment) led by David Vessey and Ian Miller to evaluate the assessment landscape in HE. The editorial team are working on an open access resource on good practice in assessment, whilst a number of the group strands are considering assessment in relation to transition to HE, creativity and authenticity, and post-graduate experience.

**Disability Project** - Following on from the HUK EDI report we identified studying with a disability and disability history as a key area History UK should be investigating and tackling. As a result, SH announced that the project will look at the intersections of disability and History, specifically the personal experience of staff and students and the teaching of disability histories. A review of the subject through case studies, surveys and focus groups is intended and we are liaising with the RHS on funding with this.

**BME Events and Activities Small Grants Scheme** - We have also received a report from Jenni Hyde from the Social History Society about the BME grants which we support through the Society. The scheme is intended to support histories of, or by people from, BME communities

in the UK. The grants for 2023/24 were adjudicated by Michael Joseph (Cambridge), Miranda Lowe (Natural History Museum) and Jonathan Saha (Durham) and were awarded to five full and one partial project, including histories of Filipino migration, the Black lesbian and Gay movement 1960s-1990s and a BME post-graduate summer school to foster a new generation of BME History scholars at QMUL.

### **Officer Vacancies**

- Communications officer – SH pointed to the importance of this role and suggested that this could potentially be shared. We need someone who is willing and able to maintain the website, interact with social media and monitor and respond on HUK's behalf to what is going on more systematically and quickly. SH noted that we are responsive to cuts and redundancies but are on the back foot where this is concerned so a timelier intervention is needed. Please contact us if you or a colleague are interested (including non-SC members).
- Treasurer – SH updated the committee that Jasper Heinzen (York) has come forward to take over the treasurer role from Richard Hawkin's long service in this position. A meeting to start the process is forthcoming as Jasper steps into the role, for which we're very appreciative.

### **Officers' reports**

**Treasurer** – Grainne Goodwin (GG) spoke to Richard Hawkin's report in his absence. She reported that by March 2024 we have a very healthy balance. Even with contributions to the Social History BME Grant and refreshment costs for the AGM/Plenary there is still a small profit for 2022/23 and a sizable financial cushion for future work or projects.

**Research** – SH spoke to the report tabled by Sara Barker (SB). She outlined SB's three main points: 1) dividing the research role with interested parties; 2) undertaking a brief survey to send to departmental research officers to see where HUK can coordinate events that would be useful to colleagues; 3) exploring the possibility of an event next academic year focused on students as researchers bringing together students, academics, and professional services staff.

**Education** – On Simon Peplow's behalf SH reported that he, SH, and Liz Egan (LE) have been having conversations about a 'New to Teaching' workshop event, sponsored by HUK and the RHS, which they are planning to hold online in early June. The event is aimed both at those new to teaching History in higher education, as well as those who may have experience with some aspects but wish to develop their thoughts on other elements of teaching (e.g., designing a module). The workshop will be structured around active group discussions facilitated by experienced teachers, such as attendees responding to a set scenario or discussing an outline syllabus for a proposed module, etc.

The Student Engagement Working group is continuing its main project, using various pots of funding to launch surveys and focus groups at a number of institutions to explore student and staff understandings of 'engagement'. This is designed to explore the various factors that play a role in how students engage with their studies (including extracurricular activities), what could be done to increase their levels of engagement, and essentially exploring what 'engagement' means to students. The outcomes of this project will hopefully allow further understanding of the kinds of decisions made on what our students prioritise or see as 'important', feeding into evidence-based proposals through the production of staff and student co-created resources, as well as a pedagogic publication. Deborah Toner suggested a colleague working at Leicester is undertaking research which could contribute to the group's findings elsewhere.

**ECR** – LE reported back on the outcomes of an online survey she conducted in early 2024 to understand ECR engagement with HUK and to gather feedback that could be built into the 'New to Teaching' workshop and the 'Academic Jobs Bootcamp', including delivery preferences (online or in person). Most of those surveyed were ECRs and out of 31, 18 described themselves as aware of HUK but unclear on what it does, while 9 had no previous knowledge of HUK. Only 7 respondents had previously attended a HUK event so some promotional work with this demographic of historians still needs to be undertaken.

LE noted that there were somewhat mixed responses to online or in person formats, but most respondents felt they were more likely to attend online events than in person ones. However, there was also a desire for the networking opportunities and realism of the in-person experience. Again, location was important as some respondents stated that this might factor into their decision making. There also appeared to be more appetite for the New to Teaching event to be online compared to the Academic Jobs Bootcamp. This was reinforced by ECR concerns around job precarity, lack of funding for travel and accommodation costs, etc.

On the Academic Jobs Bootcamp LE suggested there was support for this later in the summer months to allow ECRs to juggle attendance alongside teaching commitments and to consider delivery in hybrid format. Respondents were keen to keep the same format as past bootcamps but expressed a desire for greater and more timely feedback which is often a component which is lacking in their experience of shortlisting and interviews. LE will be designing the job advert and welcomes input on the job spec and any volunteers for reviewing applications and/or interviewing.

The survey also suggested that there was ECR interest in other types of session including postdoctoral fellowships, grant writing and book contracts/publishing opportunities and LE will explore these.

**EDI** – Much of the EDI work at the moment is around the Disability Project discussed in greater detail above.

**Communications** – As earlier discussion indicates we are still seeking to recruit to the role, see Officer Vacancies.

## Updates from institutions

A number of themes emerged from updates:

- Various institutional representatives spoke of the cost-cutting exercises that are taking place across HE and colleagues reported recent or imminent voluntary severance schemes and redundancy threats.
- Members from Scottish institutions noted that funding for students under the Scottish provision of HE to home students was also being squeezed.
- A common thread in these discussions was that History per se was not under threat but was subject to widescale changes and restructuring at an institutional and sector level. Colleagues also noted other budgetary measures which were affecting their departments, including recruitment and promotion freezes, withholding of research funding (often with no transparency or reflection of REF monies), no overseas travel or related expenses, etc.
- On a more positive note, it was suggested by departments that had been through this process already that we can use our own resources and public data to challenge negative narratives around the discipline and turn to information sources such as HUK's (2022) [Trends in Higher Education report](#) to mount a defence of History in our institutions.
- There was also reflection on growing numbers of neurodivergent students in recent History cohorts which underlined the need outlined earlier on understanding the experiences of students and staff with disabilities.

## Projects/events

- DL outlined the upcoming forum dedicated to experiential and practise-based learning in March 2024 and will report on this at the next meeting. He also reflected that events such as these were useful for promoting the discipline in the institution and signalling the value of History more widely.
- SH reported that Sarah Jones (SJ) and SH are investigating a Pedagogy Forum session to consider getting material dedicated to teaching and pedagogical research published based on feedback from past attendees and would welcome suggestions for speakers. SH requested that if members have an idea for a forum theme or event then to let her or SJ know.
- GG reported back on Manuela William's behalf regarding the employability project investigating student, alumni, and employer perceptions of skills developed on History degrees. The project, co-created with a student at Strathclyde, is now at mid stage, including interviews of employers and alumni.

## **HUK AGM and workshop - in-person event for Autumn**

Based on the experience of the 2023 in-person workshop and hybrid AGM event, SH suggested we revisit the location, timing and nature of the event. For 2025/26 HUK might consider hosting the workshop in the summer months and potentially decoupling this from the AGM. AS reaffirmed that a live event does not need to take place in London and if an institution elsewhere in the country and accessible for SC members was happy to host a HUK AGM/plenary event we would support this. Likewise, if the feeling was that colleagues liked the idea of a London-based event which they could coordinate with research visits or other activities, we are open to continuing this and taking advantage of the offer to host from the IHR.

AG suggested a mid-week, in-person event would be welcome so that weekends and summer leave were not eaten into. For 2025 we could consider the relative lull between the end of teaching and exam boards to schedule an in-person workshop or plenary.