UCML Executive

July 2024

Report from the Vice-Chair (Research)

1. British Academy Manifesto

The British Academy published a Manifesto for the Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts in June 2024.

On June 10th UFCL published a response on our website, welcoming the Manifesto:

UCFL warmly welcomes the British Academy's Manifesto for the Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts and urges the next UK Government to implement its recommendations as a matter of priority.

The Manifesto makes a clear case for the need for the next Government to utilise the vast potential of the humanities and social sciences and sets out a series of key actions through which the Government can achieve three overarching goals:

1. To support an educational system that is sustainable, sparks creativity and offers opportunities to all;
2. To use insights and evidence — from all disciplines —to address society's biggest challenges;
3. To collaborate with partners abroad and nurture research talent in the United Kingdom.

The University Council for Languages embraces the centrality of languages provision in the measures proposed by the BA to attain these outcomes, including the need for a broad, balanced and interconnected school curriculum which encourages all students to study a range of disciplines and languages for as long as possible.

UCFL also endorses the Manifesto's call for a review of higher education funding to deliver a sustainable model that delivers a wide breadth of subjects and is resilient to regional inequalities in provision.

In line with other stakeholders, UCFL strongly supports the Manifesto's proposal that the UK should rejoin the Erasmus Plus scheme and play an active role in shaping the development of the next round of European Framework Programmes.

We also echo the Manifesto's emphasis on the potential of insights from SHAPE disciplines to inform thinking about key technologies and the ethics, sustainability and inclusivity of innovation. Indeed, as the President of the British Academy Professor Julia Black argues, the Arts and Humanities are not an 'optional extra' but need to be at the forefront of contemporary issues.

In addition to the Manifesto, the British Academy is preparing to publish a series of data-driven maps highlighting cold spots in access to humanities and social science in UK higher education, which will be available from the Academy's SHAPE Observatory platform.

2. Open Access consultation

UCFL has submitted a response to the REF Open Access consultation, emphasising the likely negative impacts for EDI of an extension of OA requirements, especially for monographs, given the increased costs of publication and associated bureaucracy. This is likely to have particular impacts for Early Career Scholars and researchers in smaller/less wealthy institutions, especially if the new rules were to be introduced mid-cycle. Languages are likely to be impacted in additional ways, since for many scholars, international presses are the most appropriate site of publication to engage with the academic field and to develop careers, and so researchers are faced with choosing between the best (for them) publishers and publishers which have REF-compatible practices. If significant work cannot be submitted to REF, high-quality researchers will not be submitted and then possibly moved to teaching-only contracts or lose their positions. The new costs of REF participation could suggest that entire departments are not contributing to the research profile (and QR funding) of the institution, and face reductions or closure.

3. Humanities Summit

A Humanities Summit took place in the Institute of Historical Research on June 26th, attended by the VC Research and VC Education and featuring a presentation from the Chair on supporting institutions in at a time of challenge (see Chair's report). Key information to share from the summit:

The SAS is beginning a humanities advocacy programme, which will provide training and opportunities to develop advocacy work. This will include an annual summit, which will address the challenges facing the sector, our responses, track changes, and share good practice. It will include advocacy days on how to work with key leaders and policy makers and an annual lecture series celebrating all the arts and humanities has to offer. There will also be a relaunch of the Being Human festival.

Jenny Richards flagged the **Literary Scholar and Scientists in Conversation** series. These are conversations between literary scholars and scientists who are already collaborating, taking about why they are doing it, and what comes from the collaboration. Jenny is creating a database of collaborations. Jenny is keen to collaborate with UFCL on this, so I am working with her on this. **Please send me details of any collaborations you are aware of**.

The **British Academy is mapping where cold spots** are around arts and humanities provision, in interactive maps on their website. There will be **a BA SHAPE conference on April 2nd 2025**.

Consultants Bond and Coyne shared their **Wonderwhat tool** (www.wonderwhat.co.uk). It is currently its beta version and will be upgraded by the end of the year, with the aim of making it freely available to all school pupils, to help them think about careers in arts and humanities by drawing on processes and visuals of the kinds of apps and platforms with which they engage for fun.

4. UCFL PGR bursary

There were no applications for the PGR bursary competition in the round which closed on the 12th April. Please encourage PGR students in your institutions to apply!

5. Horizon funding

A useful calendar for Horizon funding can be found here.

6. AHRC focal awards/ landscape funding

The AHRC have released further detail on the future of PGR funding.

Context

The AHRC is the major funder for PhDs in the arts and humanities, including languages. In September 2023, the AHRC announced changes to the way in which they fund PhD study. The new schemes launched in November 2023 with students starting in October 2026. Key changes include:

- A 25% reduction in the number of PhD students funded by the AHRC, reducing from 425 to around 300 per year by 2029 to 2030.
- An end to the Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) model, replaced with 'Landscape Awards' allocated via a formula model. Up to 50 HEIs will receive 1-3 studentships per year over 5 years, beginning in October 2026.
- A re-introduction of Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs), now known as 'Focal Awards'. The first two themes are 'Arts and humanities for a healthy planet, people and place', and 'Arts and humanities for creative economy'. 5-6 awards in each theme will be funded in the first round, with 20-30 studentships in each over the lifetime of the award.

Allocation of the Landscape Awards

The AHRC have released new details on how the funding formula will function for the landscape awards https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/developing-people-and-skills/ahrc/training-and-support-within-the-future-doctoral-provision-programme/.

There are two parts to the formula:

1- The first determines how many HEIs in each region are supported (the formula will provide an allocation to HEIs in all 12 UK International Territorial Levels (a terminology which refers to administrative geographies, as explained here). For instance, if 10% of the arts and humanities research students in the UK are in a region, that region would gain 10% of the 50 awards available.
2- The second determines which HEIs in a region are supported, determined by 2 variables: the number of research staff within arts and humanities (as a proxy for research capacity) and AHRC grant income (as a proxy for research quality).

The formula will be run every five years. It will be run in Spring 2024 with successful HEIs informed of outcomes in July 2024.

Allocation of the Focal Awards

The following timeline has been published:

- Final deadline for applications from consortia of HEIs and/or Research Organisations – 2nd July 4pm
- Peer review late July to mid-Jan

- Moderation panel Feb 2025
- Outcomes announced May/June 2025
- Students recruitment June 25-26
- First cohort start Oct 26 4 cohorts full-time or equivalent p/t)

Points of concern

The new schemes raise a number of potentially problematic points for arts and humanities disciplines (including languages):

- Reduced funding (and the possibility of taking a more STEM-focussed approach to at least one of the themes, further limiting arts and humanities funding)
- The possibility of emerging 'cold spots' in arts and humanities funding, depending on whether the Landscape Funding and Focal Awards are awarded.
- Focal Awards may be intended to respond to the issue of cold spots/ uneven distribution of funding. However these awards do not allow for the inclusion of admin costs in the bid, which will favour larger/more research-intensive HEIs who have existing structures which can be leveraged with reduced cost (compared to institutions who would need to start from scratch).
- The focus on existing research success and capacity may enhance structural divides between institutions or regions rather than reduce them.
- The funding is also short term, so it is difficult to build lasting structures - there is no follow-on funding and the theme of the future Focal Awards will be different, meaning collaborations which meet the needs of the existing call may not fit the requirements of future calls.

Future funding – Focal Awards

The AHRC invited suggestions for themes for the next round of doctoral Focal Awards, using the AHRC 'Where Next' questionnaire. This questionnaire closed on 16th April 2024.

UCFL and the ILCS have provided responses drawing on findings produced by the AHRC Future of Languages Research Fellows, which captures the views of the subject area. Their report, entitled 'Research in Languages, Cultures and Societies: Voices of Researchers in the UK' can be found here.

7. RSVP/Supervisor training

The Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP) is a four-year £4.6million project that will review, enhance and shape doctoral supervision practice. HEIs were invited to join a pilot project via an expression of interest. It will be good to cascade the findings of the project.

Liz Wren-Owens