

THE BRITISH ACADEMY



Report of a
Working Party on a Humanities
Research Council

JUNE 1990

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As Presented to and Endorsed by the Council of the British Academy
29 June 1990

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Working Party on a Humanities Research Council.

1. On 29 September 1989 the Council of the Academy set up a Working Party to consider the possibility and desirability of the establishment of a Humanities Research Council. The terms of reference of the Working Party, approved by Council at a subsequent meeting, were as follows: (a) to report whether the setting up of a Humanities Research Council would be in the interests of the disciplines which the Academy exists to foster; and (b) to report what relationship the Academy should seek to have to such a council, were one to be set up. The Working Party consisted of the President, Professor M.A Boden (Vice-President of the Academy, and at that time a member of the ABRC), Sir Keith Thomas (member of the ESRC), and Dr Peter Mathias (a former member of the ABRC).
2. The Working Party submitted to Council an interim report on its deliberations during the period September 1989 – February 1990, and presented its provisional conclusions. The interim report was considered by Council at its meeting in March 1990 and a summary of its conclusions was considered by sections at their March meetings. The present, final, report incorporates in a modified form much of the material of the interim report and is presented to the meeting of Council in June 1990.

Background to the setting up of the Working Party.

3. The public funding of research, including research in the humanities, has recently been a topic of national discussion, and of Government concern. Criticisms have been levelled at the present system of research support, and in particular at the role of the Academy in the distribution of public funds for research in the humanities. It is important that the Academy

should take account of the criticisms of the present system and should evaluate proposals for change.

The Present System.

4. Public support is given to research in most disciplines, through Research Councils which are funded by the Department of Education and Science (DES) "to develop the natural and social sciences, including engineering, to maintain a fundamental capacity of research and scholarship and to support relevant postgraduate education." Different areas of research within the natural and social sciences are catered for by the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC), the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), the Agricultural and Food Research Council (AFRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The work of the Research Councils is co-ordinated by the Advisory Board for the Research Councils (ABRC). For the humanities there is no Research Council: instead, the funds provided for research by the DES are administered by the British Academy.
5. The Academy differs from a Research Council in several ways. The Academy is primarily a learned society, a Fellowship of scholars who have achieved distinction in their chosen fields. It is for the humanities and social sciences what the Royal Society is for the natural sciences. The Officers, Council and Fellows of the Academy, like Fellows of the Royal Society, are elected by their peers; they are not appointed by Government as are the members of the Research Councils. Whereas the chairman of a Research Council holds a full-time salaried post, the Presidency of the British Academy is an honorary office. Members of Research Council committees are paid for their services; members of the Academy give their services free.
6. The Academy, like the Royal Society but unlike most Research Councils, disposes of private as well as public funds in the support of research. The Academy differs from the Royal Society in two ways: first, unlike the Royal Society, it does not come under the umbrella of the ABRC; secondly, public funds make up a much larger proportion of the Academy's budget than they do of the Royal Society's budget.
7. Despite these unique features of the Academy, its activities resemble in many ways those of the Research Councils. The Academy is the provider of studentships for those who wish to take postgraduate degrees in the arts, as the Councils are the providers of studentships in the sciences. The Academy offers post-doctoral fellowships, senior

research fellowships, and readerships to mature scholars; it supports collaborative projects by groups of scholars, both within and across disciplines. It gives grants for travel and other research expenses, supports conferences, and, in collaboration with overseas academies, organizes academic exchanges between different countries. One of its most important activities is the support of British academic institutions abroad, such as the British Schools in Rome and Athens.

Proposals for Change

8. In a speech to the Academia Europaea in June 1989 Mr Kenneth Baker, while reaffirming the Government's commitment to the dual support system for research, indicated that he considered changes to be needed in its application and practice. The first change was a change respecting the universities' block grants: henceforth, in the calculation of these grants research funding would be identified separately from teaching funding. The second change was that the boundary between the two elements of the dual support system would be adjusted, so that there would be a transfer of funds from the UFC to the ABRC. (A third change not mentioned by Mr Baker, which might affect the funding of research indirectly, was that Universities were to be encouraged to enlarge their income by bidding competitively for student places to be funded by increased fees.)
9. Meanwhile, the role and constitution of the ABRC itself was the subject of re-examination. In summer 1988 the ABRC set up a review of Research Councils' responsibilities for the biological sciences under the chairmanship of Mr J R S Morris CBE. This committee did not restrict its activities to a consideration of the biological sciences alone: in April 1989 it recommended that the Research Council system should be replaced by a single national Research Council with six divisions. Despite support from the Royal Society, and the CVCP, this proposal met with opposition from a majority of the Research Councils. In the event, the ABRC advised the Secretary of State against it, on the grounds that it was likely to be costly, disruptive, and productive of turbulence. Instead, in November 1989, the ABRC recommended that it should be itself reconstituted into a smaller board (14 members instead of 26), including the Heads of Research Councils (HORCS) as full members, plus six independent members and two assessors from Government departments, with a full-time Chairman, and a strengthened secretariat. The ABRC's report, published in January, pointed out that the implementation of its recommendations could have consequences for the future role of the British Academy.

Motives for Setting up the Academy Working Party.

10. Council set up a Working Party not because it was convinced, in advance, of the merits of establishing a Humanities Research Council. Rather, it was concerned that the proposals for separately identifying teaching and research in the block grants to Universities, and the proposed shift of the boundary within the dual support system, might have unforeseen and undesirable consequences for the funding of research in the humanities. It was also aware that proposals for a Humanities Research Council were being privately discussed in some quarters both in Government and in policy-making bodies in Opposition Parties. Council was anxious that the Academy should not be taken by surprise by these developments, if they became public, but should have a considered answer prepared in advance. It was important to have an opportunity, before Council was called on to speak publicly for the Academy on the issue, to sound out opinion within the Sections of the Academy itself and among members of arts faculties within Universities.

11. The publication in January of the ABRC's advice to the Secretary of State on research funding showed that Council's initiative in setting up the Working Party had been well-timed. Paragraph 32 of the ABRC's advice to the Secretary of State of 15 November 1989 reads as follows: "There are also coordination difficulties in relation to areas of research presently outside the Research Council system which require attention in the not too distant future. Perhaps the most pressing problems concern humanities research, where developments in various disciplines are leading to greater overlap with the responsibilities of the ESRC and in some cases (e.g. archaeology) to new links with the laboratory-based sciences. Most humanities research is, however, currently supported from universities' general funds (UFC block grants and tuition fees). The forthcoming separate identification of the UFC's funding for teaching and research, and the proposed change in the boundary of the dual support system, make the absence of specific funding analogous to the Research Councils' support in other disciplines seem increasingly anomalous. We recommend that the DES should review this question, as a matter of urgency, with the aim of bringing humanities research within the umbrella of the Research Council system. This will have important implications concerning relations with the British Academy and as regards the continuation of its present quasi-research-council functions."

Activities of the Working Party

12. Members of the Working Party have met with each other on the following occasions: 23 November, 9 January, 12 January, 19 February, 11 June. They have taken advice from the Chairman of the ABRC, the Chief Executive of the UFC, the three humanities members of the UFC, senior representatives of the DES and the Chairman of the Postgraduate Student Selection Committee. The President of the Academy published an article in the THES setting out the background and terms of reference of the Working Party and invited comments from readers. The Deans of Arts of the Universities of the UK were invited to a meeting with Officers of the Academy and members of the Working Party on January 11. and opinion on the topic was canvassed. Representatives of the Standing Committee of Arts and Social Sciences communicated the opinions of the members at a meeting with the President and Officers of the Academy in June. Written communications were received from the bodies and individuals listed in Appendix A.
13. All Section meetings in December were invited to comment on the desirability of the following models for future arrangements for the funding of research in the humanities. (a) a freestanding Humanities Research Council is established under the ABRC, taking over many of the present responsibilities of the Academy, leaving it to revert to its former role as a private learned society, principally concerned with elections to Fellowship, the award of prizes and lectures, the distribution of private funds etc. (b) a new Humanities and Social Science Research Council, on the model of the present ESRC, takes over the present responsibilities of that Council and the recent responsibilities of the Academy for distributing public funds; (c) the Academy seeks a relationship with such a new Research Council, possibly under the aegis of the ABRC, comparable to that of the Royal Society with the scientific Research Councils – i.e. the Academy retains certain grant-giving functions and continues to receive government support; (d) the Academy becomes a member of the ABRC and seeks to organise a Humanities Research Council, under the general control of Council – i.e. the Academy has a Research Council wing, separately administered, with substantial involvement of non –Fellows; (e) the Academy itself becomes a Research Council, with whatever changes to its constitution and independence may be required.
14. The majority of sections expressing an opinion preferred the third of these options, which would mean that the Academy would have a relationship to any new Research Council analogous to that of the Royal Society to Research Councils in the natural sciences. There was some

support for the fourth proposal, that the Academy should set up its own research council wing. Reservations were expressed about any link with the ESRC, and some sections expressed a preference for a Humanities Research Council rather than a joint Humanities and Social Science Research Council. Section Twelve (Social Studies) in particular thought that a joint council would be an arrangement unfavourable to research in Social Science. There was also some expression of preference for the status quo over any of the options listed.

15. At its meeting on February 19 1990 the Working Party drew up an interim report. The report summarised and evaluated the arguments which had been put to the Working Party for and against the concept of a Humanities Research Council, and expressed its opinion on the desirability in principle of its establishment. It made recommendations, on the assumption that Government should decide to set up such a Council, as to the relationship which the Academy should seek to have to it. The report was considered by Council in March and sent on, without comment, to Sections for consideration at their spring meetings. The present final report takes account of the responses of Sections, which are reported in a later paragraph, and of communications received from bodies outside the Academy since February. In making its recommendations the Working Party also took note of a consultation between the President and Secretary of the Academy and the Chairman and Secretary of the ABRC on 30 May 1990.

Arguments for a Humanities Research Council.

I. Argument from Untidiness of Present Arrangements.

16. There is a certain untidiness about the public funding of humanities research through the Academy. Whereas the Academy is an independent body, constitutionally responsible to its Fellows, Research Councils are responsible to the tax payer through parliament. Members and chairmen of Research Councils are appointed by the Secretary of State and non-academics can form a majority of members. Some civil servants appear to dislike the idea of Government funds being distributed by a body which is elected rather than appointed. From the opposite angle, it is sometimes complained that the acceptance by the Academy of public funds for distribution hamstrings it as an independent critic of Government policies towards the humanities. Because the Academy is the distributor of public grants, some of its critics feel that it cannot take

an external view of the support of research, or evaluate the grant process from an independent scholarly viewpoint.

17. Considered as a learned society the Academy has a constituency which covers the social sciences as well as the humanities. However, because of the existence of the ESRC, the Academy's quasi-research-council functions concern the humanities alone. This seems anomalous to many people, both within and without the Academy.

II. Argument from the Unrepresentativeness of the Academy.

18. Complaints are often made that the Academy is somehow unrepresentative: that it favours some disciplines and some universities rather than others; in particular that it favours older disciplines and older universities rather than newer ones. The complaint, in crude terms, is that among the Fellows of the Academy there are too many Oxbridge dons studying old-fashioned subjects. Universities with arts departments which have received the highest research rating from the UFC find it difficult to understand why so few of their faculty are Fellows of the British Academy. Such concerns are the sharper if the Academy is not only the senior learned society but is also in effect the research council for the humanities. Particular disciplines (e.g. English) which feel under-represented in the Academy are for that reason unhappy with a situation in which the Academy has the distribution of funding for research by academic staff as well as control over the award of postgraduate studentships.

III. The Argument from the Dangers of New Funding Arrangements.

19. The previous arguments against the status quo in humanities funding have often been heard. A new urgency has been given to the debate by the proposals for new methods of research funding described above. These concern the identification of the resources allocated by the UFC on research-based criteria, the allocation of resources on teaching-based criteria on the basis of competitive university bids to provide student places, and the proposed shift in the boundary of the dual support system. All of these may have a deleterious effect on the funding of research in the arts.
20. Four elements are at present involved in the UFC calculation of its distribution of resources on research-based criteria: SR = resources distributed on criteria related to staff and research student numbers; JR = resources selectively distributed on judgement; DR = resources distributed on the basis of income from Research Councils and charitable

bodies; CR = resources distributed on the basis of contract research income. The proposed transfer of funds to the ABRC will lead to the abolition of the DR element attributable to income from Research Council grants. This means that some money which hitherto universities were free to use e.g. for basic library funding, will in future come to the universities from the Research Councils and would most likely not be used for any humanities purpose.

21. This danger to the humanities would be increased if, as is sometimes rumoured, JR and eventually SR were to be transferred to ABRC; if, for example, research library funding were to be identified separately from teaching library funding, and research library funding in arts were to be removed from the block grant. The sums involved could be large, especially if they ultimately came to include not only finance for library resources but also that part of academic salaries which were deemed to be connected with research.
22. The equivalent of laboratory provision in the sciences is library provision in the humanities. Our colleagues in science can apply for some experimental equipment through the Research Councils, but members of humanities departments cannot apply for books. A future might be envisaged in which humanities departments charged research-funding bodies research training support grants ("bench fees") for extra library purchases, and the associated staff costs, needed for particular humanities research students and projects. Such a development need not necessarily be malign with respect to humanities research, but there would be an obvious need for a high-powered body to monitor the allocation of such funds. Certainly there is a case for library provision to be treated specifically as research provision in the humanities. Already, in the dual support consultative document recently circulated, there is reference to "contribution to library costs" being in the overall percentage addition for overheads about which opinion is canvassed (para. 10). Transfer of research funding from the UFC to an ABRC without humanities representation could be damaging for research in the humanities if it means that the Universities receive less money for library provision and libraries receive no ABRC funding.
23. The system of inviting tenders for student places is likely to have particularly damaging implications in arts subjects. The system of bidding for student places imposed by the UFC may lead universities to make their staff teach longer hours, so as to provide the extra places to attract extra funds, and this would eat away all available research time. Teaching loads are likely to increase not only because of the movement towards full cost fees, but also because of student demand, which is

running high in the humanities. Time, as Council has previously emphasized in communication with the UFC, is in the humanities the single most valuable piece of research equipment. Under the present arrangements there is no public body with the duty to point out the consequences of such funding changes for research in the humanities.

IV. The Argument from the Muffled Voice of the Humanities.

24. The humanities, it is argued, have been ill served during the years when the Academy has been their only official spokesman. There is no reason why the humanities should be content with half the funding of the (narrower area of) the social sciences. (See the comparative budgets set out in Appendix B.) There is an urgent need for a significant increase in the baseline not only to take account of the more expensive modes of research which are now needed in many arts subjects, but simply to bring research funding in the humanities to a level proportionately equivalent to that in other areas of scholarly endeavour. Currently, for instance, a historian whose work happens to fall within the area of competence of the ESRC can hope for much ampler research support than his colleague whose work is within the remit of the Academy. Senior scholars internationally distinguished for innovative research in the humanities do not have available to them the kinds of opportunities presented by Royal Society Professorships to their colleagues in science. A HRC could press the case, one which has so far gone by default in the ABRC and with DES, for adequate public funding of research in the humanities.
25. Unlike a Research Council, the Academy lies outside the Whitehall arena. It cannot press the claims of its subjects on the ABRC or the Public Expenditure Survey. There is a widespread erroneous view that research in the humanities involves no cost, but is a bonus flowing from the teaching function of the universities. This error, it had been argued to us, has survived so long mainly because there has been no Research Council to argue for the needs of arts subjects, and to argue it where it matters, within the closed world of Whitehall. The need for an effective voice for the humanities is claimed to be all the more urgent now that the discipline committees within the UFC have been abolished.
26. The way in which research equipment in the humanities is inadequately supported is illustrated by the lack of funding for collections of rare books and manuscripts in University libraries. Many of the libraries of the older Universities have priceless collections of such texts. These, unlike the collections of the major American universities, were not acquired for their rarity value: they are books acquired in the normal

course of purchase for scholarly use over the century which have become rare and valuable in the course of time. These collections are held not just for the benefit of the universities in which they are housed, but are consulted with ever increasing energy by the international community of scholars. The books and manuscripts will lose their utility and their value unless they are properly conserved. But no public funds are given to University libraries for conservation purposes. Because these collections are part of the national treasure, the DES regards them as the responsibility of the Office of Arts and Libraries; because they are located in Universities, the Office of Arts and Libraries regards them as the responsibility of the DES; and in the event they are funded by neither department, and risk decay and destruction. A Humanities Research Council would be well placed to campaign for adequate funding to ensure that this national resource is not allowed to waste away.

V. The Argument for Balance with the Needs of Science.

27. Some within the ESRC would favour a humanities research council as an ally under the ABRC; though the two councils together would receive only a small proportion of the total funding they would jointly, unlike the ESRC by itself, represent a majority of academic staff in the universities, and would accordingly have considerable prestige. If humanities and social sciences were both represented, then in association they would have greater power; if they remain separate with the ESRC within, and the Academy without, the ABRC aegis, it is easier for those indifferent to their interests to ignore their claims
28. If the funding of research in the humanities was within the ambit of the Research Councils, the very modesty of its needs by comparison with those of the social and natural sciences would make it easier for it to claim, on a particular occasion, a proportionately large increase in annual funding for a particularly noteworthy project. A claim for nine million pounds to launch a new Dictionary of National Biography (for instance), which would be unthinkable in the context of an overall Academy budget of fifteen million, would be a barely perceptible perturbation in an overall ABRC budget of 824 million. There is at present not a single publicly funded research centre for the humanities in this country: a Humanities Research Council would be well placed to present the case for their establishment.

VI. The Argument from Borderline Cases & Interdisciplinary Methods.

29. With the development of quantitative methods in many humanities disciplines, the application of scientific techniques in archaeology, and the increased employment of computers in all areas of scholarly endeavour, it is argued, the disciplines represented by the British Academy can no longer afford to stand in isolation from the other disciplines which come within the aegis of the research council system. The problems arising from the interdisciplinary nature of archaeology have long been recognised and tackled. Other disciplines face similar problems which await solution. One primary example is linguistics, where the ESRC is currently funding a number of corpora which perhaps were rather the Academy's province. But as a corpus is an infrastructure for research which might be either into transformational grammar or sociolinguistics, it is hard to say exactly whence funding should be provided.
30. More generally, developments in computational linguistics, the need for substantial databases, and the interaction between members of the speech and natural language community on the one hand, and the information technology community on the other, have rendered archaic the science/arts divide in this area. This is symbolised by the fact that the proposals for a national corpus of the English language, a scientific endeavour which would obviously benefit from the expert advice to be found within the Academy, are currently being considered by a body which answers to the SERC and the DTI, bypassing both the Academy and the ESRC.
31. It should be noted that in para 10 of the ABRC's advice, among "areas of science with past and prospective future difficulties in securing necessary coordination between Councils" we find listed "aspects of cognitive science". These aspects are bound to interlock with the concerns of more than one section of the Academy. When the ABRC is being reconstituted in order to facilitate inter-council collaboration, it is more than ever anomalous that the humanities should be outside the research council network.

VII. The Argument from the Need for Parity of Student Support.

32. The most difficult feature of the present arrangements is the Academy's role as the agent of the Secretary of State in the award of postgraduate scholarships. The problems here were vividly brought out by the events of 1989-90. The DES fixed the basic postgraduate maintenance grant

for 1989–80 as £ 3125. Such a stipend was universally condemned as inadequate. The total level of support announced by the Department for the year for postgraduate studentships in the humanities was such as to permit only 760 new awards even at this inadequate level. This contrasted with a base figure of 860 in previous years. The Academy was thus placed in a position where it would have to turn away candidates who in earlier years would have been assured of a place, and where even to successful candidates it would have to offer a grant which was too small for them to live on.

33. But worse was to follow. The Research Councils had recently been given the power to fix the level of postgraduate support for themselves. They decided to use this power to raise the 1989–90 grants by £ 600. The Academy was quite unable to raise its grants to match those of the Research Councils. It lacked the power of virement to use for postgraduate scholarships money given for other purposes; and even if it had enjoyed this power it lacked the funds within its overall very modest budget to make an adequate transfer. To match the level of science grants without extra funding – even if this had been allowed – would have meant cutting the number of awards to about 580, a reduction of 33% in a single year.
34. The Academy, accordingly, had to bear the odium for a situation in which graduate students in the humanities were uniquely discriminated against. Besides having to put up with the objective inadequacy of their grant, humanities students suffered a sense of injustice at being worse off than their science colleagues. In these circumstances it was not surprising that the number of those awarded Academy grants who withdrew or abandoned their course during the year showed a very significant increase over previous years.
35. This train of events showed that the Academy, while theoretically more independent of Government control than the Research Councils, is in fact much more at the mercy of Government decision. The plight of the postgraduates for which the Academy is responsible is the result of decisions in which it had no part. Throughout the academic year the Academy has been involved in correspondence and discussion with the DES in an endeavour to restore the number and level of humanities graduate awards. At the time of this final report no formal answer has yet been received to representations made to the Department as long ago as October 1989. Those who favour a Humanities Research Council argue that the impossible situation which the Academy was placed throughout 1989–90 is one which could never have happened if the

funding of the Humanities had been within the aegis of the Research Council system.

36. Currently, Academy postgraduate students are treated less well financially than their ESRC and other Research Council funded counterparts. Their grants are lower and provision for their research support is poorer; they have less chance of success in applying for photocopying and research costs. These differences in treatment are not justified by significantly different needs. In these circumstances it is not surprising that the argument is heard that shared administration of studentships by Research Councils would ensure reduced costs and equal treatment.

Arguments against a Humanities Research Council.

37. The arguments set out above are vigorously controverted by many of those who have communicated with the working party. The independent arguments against an Humanities Research Council can be reduced to two main heads.

I. The Argument from Sensitivity to Academic Needs.

38. A Humanities Research Council would have a membership appointed by Government, not elected by academics. It could include lay members who might need educating about the intrinsic value of the humanities. It would be very likely that it would operate on the model of the existing ESRC. Such a development was deplored by some of our respondents on the following grounds. Like its predecessor the SSRC, it is alleged, the ESRC has proved excessively bureaucratic and overenthusiastic for collective as opposed to individual research. More recently, it has adopted criteria for the assessment of the performance of graduate students which may well be inappropriate for students in the humanities. Again the ESRC is alleged to differ from the Academy in being less willing to support research in a responsive rather than a directive mode. The abandonment by the ESRC of single-discipline committees was deplored by some of those who gave evidence to the working party.
39. Two features of ESRC procedures were singled out as making it an inappropriate model for humanities funding. First of all, in the humanities quite small grants may make a very important contribution to research. The Academy last year made 303 Small Personal Research Grants, totaling £ 389,683 at an average size of £ 1,286. The ESRC is reluctant to give small grants of this kind on anything approaching this

scale; the number of grants from its own "small grants" budget was, according to the most recent Annual Report, 24 at an average size of £ 3,770. Secondly, the financial memorandum which governs the operation of the ESRC provides for the possibility that research proposals which are controversial should be referred to the Secretary of State. This is regarded by some of our respondents as compromising academic freedom.

II. The Argument that Money would be Better Spent Elsewhere.

40. At present, the President and senior Officers of the Academy, and the members of Council, are unpaid. The Chairman and Board members of Research Councils are paid at rates comparable to those of the board members of other public sector bodies. Members of most Academy committees receive no remuneration other than travel expenses. An HRC would need to pay those who served it in the same way as Research Councils. Unless genuinely new money can be found, these additional costs would lead to a further reduction in the number and value of both postgraduate studentships and awards to established scholars.
41. Those in favour of an HRC counter that a Humanities Research Council, separate from the present five and represented on the ABRC, need cost no more than a small fraction of the funds for research. Though a new building would no doubt be necessary, it should share the Swindon site occupied by other Research Councils and take advantage of the facilities, from computers to canteens, that already exist there. Its staff would share in the intercouncil mobility that should be a feature of the Swindon complex. There is no reason why the peer review mechanism should be any more expensive than that run by the Academy.
42. Against this, it should be pointed out that the Academy's administrative costs are about 5.8% of its budget, against a Research Council norm (not yet achieved by either the ESRC or the Fellowship of Engineering) of 8%. Comparative administrative costs are shown in Appendix C.

The Working Party's View on a Humanities Research Council

43. The Working Party found the arguments set out above of unequal weight. The arguments in paragraphs 16–18 it regards as overstated, and based upon a number of misunderstandings of the way the Academy operates. As a learned society, the Academy is constituted by members chosen on grounds of academic excellence, not as representatives of the Universities and other bodies from which they are drawn. Some Universities have a

specially high number of Academicians among their staff: they are the same Universities as independent surveys by the UGC found to be of outstanding excellence. But the Academy accepts that in the disbursement of public funds between candidates from Universities throughout the nation it is important that it should not only be but should be seen to be even-handed. For this reason many of its major committees contain non-Academicians, and the most important one, the selection committee for postgraduate studentships, contains a majority, including a chairman, drawn from outside the Academy, and a membership constituted to correspond to the national spread of institutions. The working party endorses the Academy's policy of inviting non-Academicians to serve on its committees, and recommends that the Academy should consider extending this practice to other committees which have hitherto consisted solely of Fellows.

44. The Working Party was convinced that the combined weight of the remaining arguments set forth earlier made an unanswerable case for research in the humanities being brought within the network of the Research Councils and within the aegis of the ABRC. There are, however, various ways in which this goal could be achieved, and the Working Party was very clear that these were not all equally desirable.
45. The simplest way of bringing humanities research within the ambit of the ABRC would be to transfer those public funds which the Academy now administers to the existing ESRC. This, it has to be said, was the most unpopular of all options both within the sections of the Academy itself, and among the Universities whose Deans of Arts the Academy consulted. It was felt that the ESRC did not command the appropriate experience to administer even the graduate studentships now awarded by the Academy, much less the various forms of postgraduate research support for which the Academy is now responsible. Furthermore, there is no indication that the ESRC would itself welcome these further responsibilities or consider itself well constituted to carry them out.
46. While the existing ESRC is clearly not the most appropriate body to administer public funds for research in the humanities, it was put to the Working Party that these funds might be most appropriately administered by a newly constituted Research Council, responsible for both the social sciences and the humanities, and with a board constituted to represent the relative strengths of these disciplines in the Universities, and a chairmanship representing alternately the humanities and social sciences.

47. The Working Party thought that this was a proposal which should be given very serious consideration, but it wished to put on record several disadvantages which it foresaw in such a Humanities and Social Science Research Council. The first was that the two sets of disciplines thus forced to cohabit might prove to be uneasy partners: the criteria for goals, methods, and success of research were very different in the humanities and the social sciences. The various scientific Research Councils would have more in common with each other than the ESRC and an HRC would have. Secondly, the Academy represents the interests not only of the humanities but also of the social sciences; and the Working Party was very impressed by the opposition of some social scientists within the Academy itself to a joint Research Council, on the grounds that this was likely to lead to a swamping of the social sciences by the humanities. The Working Party concluded that the interests both of the humanities, and of the social sciences, and of the overall balancing of national research funding, would be better served by two Councils, each with a head (HORC) on the ABRC, than by there being a single council whose head would have the responsibility for representing, on the ABRC, the research interests of the majority of academic researchers while the interests of the minority were represented by four separate HORCs.
48. If there is to be a new Research Council with responsibility for the humanities, the Working Party would prefer it to be a newly constituted Research Council for the Humanities alone. Its hesitation in recommending outright the setting up of such a Council derives principally from its fear that it would, in the present economic climate, be likely to be inadequately funded. The Working Party would, however, wish to go on record as recommending that a Humanities Research Council should be set up, provided certain conditions were met.
49. The first condition is that the method of appointment of the members of the Council should be such as to ensure that the Council would be sufficiently aware of the differences between the nature of research in the humanities and research in the sciences whether natural or social.
50. The second condition is that the new Council should be adequately funded. The criterion of adequacy is that the Council, after increased administrative costs have been discounted, should be able to fund major projects of research in the humanities which are beyond the resources of the public funding currently available to the British Academy. Examples of such projects have already been given: a new Dictionary of National Biography, a National Corpus of the English Language, a nationwide investigation, for conservation purposes, of the location and condition of

the rare books in private and public libraries. The successful British Academy/Leverhulme venture in supporting collaborative projects in the humanities, which attracted many times the number of alpha-rated projects as could be funded, revealed a substantial new type of research need which should receive recurrent support from public funds. There should be Research Professorships in the Humanities to compare with those provided by the Royal Society in the natural sciences. Permanent national research institutions in the humanities, comparable to those in the U.S. and in some European countries are, in the view of the working party, a less immediate priority than the possibility of setting up fixed-term research institutes, linked to different Universities, for specific humanities research projects.

51. The third condition is that the transfer of funding responsibilities to the new Research Council from the British Academy should leave the Academy with a responsibility for the disbursement of public funds comparable to that exercised within the sciences by the Royal Society. The detailed division of responsibilities between any future Research Council and the Academy would need to be a matter for careful consideration and negotiation; but if postgraduate scholarships, research support grants and a number of major projects were handed over to a Council, the Academy should retain the responsibility for the overseas Schools, the exchange programme with other Academies, and the appointment to senior research posts such as postdoctoral fellowships, readerships, and professorships. The working party believes that if a separate HRC were set up and many of the Academy's activities were transferred to it, it would be desirable for the Academy to seek substantially increased private funding for its independent activities, without prejudice to the continuation of public funding for those of its present tasks for which it retained responsibility.

52. The Working Party is not optimistic that the conditions it regards as essential for a satisfactory Humanities Research Council will be met in the near future. It wishes to state emphatically that it regards the status quo as preferable to an underfunded or inappropriately constituted HRC, or to the transfer of humanities funding to one of the existing Research Councils. There is, however, a third option between the status quo and a new Research Council, and that is that the Academy, retaining substantially its present responsibilities, should be brought within the ambit of the ABRC.

53. Many of the arguments set out earlier in favour of a Humanities Research Council are essentially arguments for research in the humanities being brought within the Research Council system. The setting up of a new Research Council would require legislation; the adaptation of the terms of reference of the ABRC to include the Academy would not do so. If the Academy were given a role under the ABRC umbrella, it would be easy to discover by experiment whether the inadequacies of the present system are remedied. If they are not, then the case for setting up a Humanities Research Council will become unanswerable.
54. The present terms of reference for the reconstituted ABRC are 1. To advise the Secretary of State on his responsibilities for civil science with particular reference to the Research Council system and its articulation with higher education, and the proper balance between national and international scientific activity; 2. To advise the Secretary of State on the resource needs of the Research Councils, Royal Society and Fellowship of Engineering, and on the allocation of the Science Budget between these bodies; 3. To promote effective collaboration between the Research Councils and the harmonisation of their activities, and to advise the Secretary of State on any necessary transfers of responsibilities between Councils; 4. To work closely with the UFC and PCFC on issues concerning the support of research in higher education institutions, and the training and support of postgraduate students; 5. To promote effective collaboration between Government Departments and Research Councils in the development of both their forward strategies, and in arrangements for commissioned research; 6. To promote productive interaction between the Research Councils and the users of the research which they support.
55. It is to be noted that in this document sections 1 and 2 talk of science, the rest more generally of research; "science" must in any case be taken to include "social science". If the Academy were to come under the ABRC, its terms of reference would have to be adapted. In section 1 "responsibilities for civil science" should be replaced by "responsibilities for civil science and research"; "national and international scientific activity" should be replaced by "national and international research activity". In section 2 the British Academy should be added to the list of those whose resource needs are to be the topic of advice; and the Science Budget should be replaced by the Research Budget. In section 4 perhaps "research" should be replaced by "research in science or humanities"
56. Section 24 of the ABRC advice to the Secretary of State says "When considering the appointment of independent members, it would be appropriate for the Secretary of State to consult the Royal Society, Fellowship of Engineering and – if humanities research is brought within

the Research Council system – the British Academy." If the Academy wished to come under the ABRC aegis it should be agreed in advance that such consultation should take place. But in addition to the Academy tendering advice on the appointment of one of the independent members, it would be essential, in the view of the working party, that one of the executive members of the ABRC, on equal terms with the existing HORCS, should be an Officer of the Academy. (Whether this should be one of the existing Officers, or the holder of a new Office created expressly for the purpose, would be for the Academy to determine if it decides to apply to come under the ABRC.)

57. The working party concluded in February that it was desirable that the humanities should be brought without delay within the ambit of the ABRC. This recommendation was communicated to Sections with their papers for the Spring meetings. The reaction of Sections was overwhelmingly in support of the view that research in the humanities should be brought within the network of the Research Councils and under the aegis of the ABRC and that the Academy's relationship to these bodies should resemble the Royal Society's.
58. There was also general support among Sections for the principle of a Humanities Research Council, but many notes of caution were sounded, and it was clear that the working party's scepticism about the likely fulfilment of the conditions for a satisfactory HRC were widely shared.
59. The Working Party accordingly asks Council
 - (i) To endorse the Working Party's approval in principle of the institution of a Humanities Research Council, in accordance with paragraph 48 of the report.
 - (ii) To agree in accordance with paragraph 52 that the fulfilment of conditions set out in paragraphs 49–51 is essential if the channelling of public humanities research funding through a Research Council is to be welcomed by the Academy.
 - (iii) To take immediate steps towards the goal of bringing the Academy, with its present constitution and responsibilities, within the ambit of the ABRC.

APPENDICES

- A. List of written communications received from bodies and individuals
- B. Comparative budgets of the Research Councils, the Royal Society and the British Academy
- C. Comparative administrative costs of the ESRC and the British Academy

Appendix A

Written Communications Received from Bodies and Individuals

Association of University Professors of French and Heads of Departments
of French

British Association for American Studies

Committee for University English

Committee of Heads of University Law Schools

Dr V. Cromwell, Chairman of the History Postgraduate Division,
University of Sussex

Professor D.N. Dilks, School of History, University of Leeds

Sir Roger Elliott, FRS

Professor B.K. Follett, FRS

Professor E.J. Garden, Dean of Arts Faculty, University of Sheffield

Professor S. Greenbaum, Dean of Arts, University College London, and
Chairman of the Academic Council Standing Sub-Committee in Theology,
Arts and Music, University of London

Professor F.G.T. Holliday, Vice-Chancellor and Warden,
University of Durham

Professor R.D.S. Jack, Department of English Literature,
University of Edinburgh

Sir John Kingman, FRS, Vice-Chancellor, University of Bristol

Professor A.J. Minnis, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York

Scottish Education Department

Professor C. Smethurst, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, University of Glasgow

Sir David Smith, FRS, FRSE, Principal and Vice-Chancellor,
University of Edinburgh

Professor S. Smith, Department of English, University of Dundee

Standing Conference of Arts and Social Sciences

Appendix B

Research Council Budgets 1984/5 to 1989/90

| | 1984/5 | | 1985/6 | | 1986/7 | | 1987/8 | | 1988/9 | | 1989/90 | |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|--------|
| | £M | % | £M | % | £M | % | £M | % | £M | % | £M | % |
| AFRC | 46.68 | 8.81 | 52.73 | 9.33 | 57.15 | 9.59 | 54.90 | 8.44 | 61.12 | 8.73 | 74.57 | 9.28 |
| ESRC | 21.98 | 4.15 | 23.59 | 4.18 | 23.82 | 4.00 | 24.85 | 3.82 | 28.32 | 4.04 | 32.79 | 4.08 |
| MRC | 117.15 | 22.11 | 122.31 | 21.65 | 128.34 | 21.54 | 139.77 | 21.49 | 149.61 | 21.37 | 176.34 | 21.95 |
| NERC | 65.30 | 12.32 | 67.88 | 12.02 | 70.33 | 11.80 | 73.32 | 11.27 | 91.86 | 13.12 | 114.96 | 14.31 |
| SERC | 278.83 | 52.61 | 298.39 | 52.82 | 316.19 | 53.07 | 357.46 | 54.97 | 369.33 | 52.74 | 404.91 | 50.39 |
| All Councils | 529.94 | 100.00 | 564.89 | 100.00 | 595.82 | 100.00 | 650.29 | 100.00 | 700.24 | 100.00 | 803.57 | 100.00 |
| British Academy | 10.610 | | 11.171 | | 11.852 | | 12.988 | | 14.072 | | 14.766 | |
| Royal Society | 5.311 | | 5.900 | | 6.393 | | 7.224 | | 7.936 | | 11.640 | |
| % Increase (decrease) on previous year | 1984/5 | 1985/6 | 1986/7 | 1987/8 | 1988/9 | 1989/90 | | | | | | |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % | | | | | | |
| AFRC | 1.98 | 12.95 | 8.39 | (3.94) | 11.33 | 22.01 | | | | | | |
| ESRC | -3.99 | 7.32 | 0.99 | 4.30 | 13.97 | 15.80 | | | | | | |
| MRC | 3.02 | 4.40 | 4.93 | 8.90 | 7.04 | 17.87 | | | | | | |
| NERC | 5.99 | 3.95 | 3.60 | 4.25 | 25.29 | 25.15 | | | | | | |
| SERC | 9.65 | 7.02 | 5.97 | 13.05 | 3.32 | 9.63 | | | | | | |
| All | 6.36 | 6.59 | 5.48 | 9.14 | 7.68 | 14.76 | | | | | | |
| British Academy (Note 1) | 251.56 | 5.29 | 6.10 | 9.58 | 8.35 | 4.93 | | | | | | |
| Royal Society | 19.17 | 11.09 | 8.36 | 13.00 | 9.86 | 46.67 | | | | | | |

Note 1. In 1984 the British Academy took over responsibility for the administration of the Postgraduate Studentships scheme in the humanities.

The British Academy and ESRC: Comparative Resources and Administrative Expenditure, 1984/5 to 1989/90

| | 1984/5 | 1985/6 | 1986/7 | 1987/8 | 1988/9 | 1989/90 | Sources: |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---|
| | £M | £M | £M | £M | £M | £M | |
| ESRC | | | | | | | |
| ESRC salaries | 1.684 | 1.817 | na | na | 1.405 | 1.443 | British Academy: Annual Accounts |
| ESRC other running costs (Note 1) | 0.926 | 1.562 | na | na | 1.228 | 1.433 | ESRC: 1984/5 to 1987/8, Annual Reports 1988/89 & 1989/90, correspondence with ESRC |
| Total ESRC running costs (Note 1) | 2.610 | 3.379 | 3.046 | 3.006 | 2.633 | 2.876 | |
| Total ESRC expenditure | 21.979 | 23.587 | 23.82 | 24.845 | 28.317 | 32.792 | |
| Running costs as % of total exp. | 11.87% | 14.33% | 12.79% | 12.10% | 9.30% | 8.77% | |
| ESRC Staff Numbers (Note 2) | 112 | 100 | 108 | 109 | 109 | 113 | |
| ESRC expenditure per staff member | £ 196,241 | £ 235,870 | £ 220,556 | £ 227,936 | £ 259,789 | £ 290,195 | |
| British Academy | | | | | | | |
| BA salaries | 0.308 | 0.357 | 0.371 | 0.405 | 0.432 | 0.502 | |
| BA other running costs | 0.267 | 0.302 | 0.330 | 0.349 | 0.388 | 0.363 | |
| Total running costs | 0.575 | 0.659 | 0.701 | 0.754 | 0.820 | 0.865 | |
| Total British Academy expenditure | 10.61 | 11.171 | 11.852 | 12.988 | 14.072 | 14.766 | |
| Running costs as % of total exp. | 5.42% | 5.90% | 5.91% | 5.81% | 5.83% | 5.86% | |
| BA Staff Numbers (FTE) | 28.9 | 25 | 27 | 28.3 | 28.1 | 28.1 | |
| BA Expenditure per staff member | £ 367,128 | £ 446,840 | £ 438,963 | £ 458,940 | £ 500,783 | £ 525,480 | |

Notes: 1. 1988-89 and 1989-90 figures exclude non-capital charges arising from relocation of the ESRC office from London to Swindon.

2. ESRC staff figures for 1984-5 and 1985-6 represent actual permanent staff in post. Thereafter the figures reflect established posts, including those filled by temporary staff.