



MINUTES

The Steering Committee meeting of History UK took place on
27th May 2021 at 1pm, via Zoom

Present: Ruth Atherton, Ross Balzaretti, Sara Barker, Kristen Brill, Leanne Calvert, Jon Chandler, Inge Dornan, Grianne Goodwin, Karen Jones, Bronach Kane, Martin Johnes, Christienna Fryar, Tim Grady, Sarah Hackett, Richard Hawkins, Sarah Holland, Adrian Howkins, Andrew Jotischky, Rosie Knight, Tracey Loughran, Stewart McCain, Heidi Mehrkens, Yolana Pringle, Euryan Roberts, Antonio Sennis, Margaret Small, Elizabeth Tingle, Alexander Titov, Deborah Toner, Jamie Wood.

Apologies: Charlotte Alston, Simon Peplow, Manuela Williams.

1. Matters arising

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

2. Co-Convenors' Report

The co-convenors, with the help of other Steering Committee members, have been busy writing statements of support and solidarity, including Aston, Kingston, and LSBU. They stressed the importance of being able to be responsive, and this required the active support of Steering Committee members.

There was a discussion about different ideas for a plenary event in late 2021. There was particular interest in a research event, particularly now the REF is over. This could include the changing landscape of research, issues that REF submissions highlighted (e.g. interdisciplinarity), and ways of evidencing research-based teaching. Other suggestions included challenges for researchers affected by pandemic conditions, particularly ECRs and PhD students, as well as the ways historical research addresses real-life problems. Attendees suggested a range of potential speakers, including the head of the AHRC or REF History panel.

The co-convenors highlighted the breadth of other work undertaken by History UK. There have been 200 responses to the Post-Pandemic Pedagogy project survey so far. The aim is to create an evidence base to be able to talk to university managers about what this tells us about history. History UK is also supporting an Active Online Reading project (QAA), and various Steering Committee members are involved in the review of the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for History. This looks like it will be quite a significant review.

The co-convenors flagged that there are a number of vacancies that are vacant, or are soon to be vacant: Secretary, EDI officer, and the Co-convenorship.

Jamie Wood has kindly agreed to stay on as co-convenor for an additional year, in order to support the work of History UK further. There were no objections from any Steering Committee members. Yolana Pringle and other attendees thanked Jamie for agreeing to stay on.

3. Skills passport (Jon Chandler, UCL)

Jon Chandler introduced his idea for a project for a History Skills passport. There is an initiative underway at UCL to embed skills in every level in the curriculum, with each module having a list of the transferable skills that it teaches attached to it. When students complete their degree they receive a list of the skills

they have developed, giving them something to take forward and add to their CVs. Jon has been involved in the research for this initiative, starting by looking at graduate careers and destinations. Here, History students had the most diverse of graduate destinations, but were among the least confident about the skills they had developed (including among other humanities subjects). As a historian, Jon also felt that evidence and language skills were missing from the initiative as a whole. He would therefore like to develop a project that focuses on history skills. This might be similar to that at www.archaeologyskills.co.uk.

The discussion indicated support for the idea. It was suggested that we know what the value of the discipline is, but it is difficult for us to articulate what this is. This might allow a common language around what we are doing, support a broader conversation around how we are teaching data skills as a subject, and feed into work around the new benchmarking statement. These areas will be important going forward when we have to fight for the discipline. It was suggested that AHA might have done something similar in the past, that might be worth exploring.

4. Consultancy on the state of History in the UK

In light of the increasing number of History departments facing cuts and closures, the co-convenors propose employing a research consultant to provide evidence on the state of History in the UK. There was a discussion on what this could focus on, including: students and employability, to help make a case for History; the cost of History and its financial contribution to universities; how consultancies are being used to inform management decisions about redundancies and the viability of programmes; public perceptions of History and ways of enhancing the profile of the discipline, particularly in secondary schools; why students decide not to take History at university. Steering Committee members also suggested that it would be worth approaching UCU and RHS, if appropriate. There was general agreement that the proposal for the research consultancy should be taken forward, and this would be circulated to Steering Committee members for approval.

5. Research Officer's report

Sara Barker provided a verbal summary of her report, available to Steering Committee members on Google Drive. The key event was Research Resilience, co-organised with The National Archives Higher Education Archives Programme team, which received positive feedback from attendees. Most of the speakers were archivists, rather than historians. There are plans to publish some follow-up blog posts on the History UK website. Inge Dorman kindly volunteered to represent History UK as a speaker at the Gerald Aylmer Seminar, organised by TNA, the IHR, and the RHS.

6. Education Officer's report

Sarah Holland provided a verbal summary of her report, available to Steering Committee members on Google Drive. There was strong support for the EDI and pedagogy project, and a number of Steering Committee members had suggestions for ways to develop it. This included looking at the kinds of issues explored by staff and students on www.stuc-uk.org/copy-of-media.

7. Treasurer's report

History UK's finances are currently healthy.

8. Communications Officer's report



History UK is currently looking for a PhD student to take on responsibility for the History UK social media account.

9. Postgraduate and ECR representative's report

Simon Peplow is planning on running the Academic Boot Camp again in advance of the next academic year.

10. Reports from Northern Irish, Scottish, and Welsh representatives

Alexander Titov reported that the number of students taking History in Northern Ireland were up last year and this year, but restrictions remain in place, and universities are not replacing people who leave automatically.

Martin Johnes reported that pressure remains on jobs in most universities in Wales, and staff are being squeezed out.

11. Updates from other organisations

There were no updates from other organisations, but Steering Committee members offered updates on threats and potential threats to History. At Goldsmiths, threats to History have been held off for at least a year, in part due to some fairly significant industrial action (a 4 month assessment boycott). Significant concerns remain, however, and staff are anticipate the need for further industrial action next year. The situation at Chester has been widely publicised via social media. The university announced that it wanted to lose 80-90 posts, mostly in humanities, but this was subsequently dropped, and it is anticipated that at least 20 posts will be lost. There are fears about humanities will not have a place at Chester in the future. The situation at Leicester has been similarly publicised on social media, with a UCU-backed campaign for a global boycott. History is not at risk, but the university have targeted select research specialisms (e.g. medieval English), including in areas that have not seen a drop in student numbers. It also appears that among those selected for redundancy are individuals who have been very active in trade unionism or other complaints against the university. With university finances in an insecure position, it seems likely that further cuts will follow in the future.

12. Any other business

None.

13. Date of next meeting

Tbc.