



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

Theme Proposals Emerging from 'Future Directions' Consultation

Following the close of the 'Future Directions' consultation in May, the AHRC Advisory Board (<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/About/Structure/Pages/AdvisoryBoard.aspx>) examined the outcomes of the consultation and identified what they felt to be the themes with the strongest support across the academic community. The Advisory Board's analysis of the themes emerging from the consultation are outlined below. Also included here is an indication of the relationship between these emerging themes and current or forthcoming cross-Council strategic programmes, as well as an analysis of potential impact of each theme.

We invite the research community to consider these themes further and use the link below to respond **by Friday 28th August 2009**:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=abl1i8ZA1nMFkEfTcPw02Q_3d_3d

The results of this further consultation will be taken to AHRC Council in September and will inform Council's judgement about strategic priorities for the next Spending Review period.

(1) *Digital Humanities.*

Relates to: Digital Economy programme

Core research issues: The digital age provides new possibilities of rethinking the very foundations of humanities research. The 'infinite archive' is challenging scholars to go back to first principles and re-engage with the basic values and themes of humanistic research, such as forms of knowledge, perception and modes of reproduction and dissemination. Research relating to the human implications of the expanded archive, including memory, perception, truth, ethics, the use of language, as well as changes in the nature of books and publishing, notions of authorship, intellectual property, the democratisation of scholarship, disciplinary boundaries and the globalisation of the knowledge economy opens up possibilities of considering what it means to be human in a digital world. While high technology computing provides the infrastructure for this new mode of communication, it is up to humanities to engage with the new methods of

organising knowledge that characterise this changing world. This fundamental investigation will tie in well with the 'transformative' agenda of the 'Digital Economy' programme.

Impacts:

This theme will provide a more comprehensive public understanding of how we live in a digital age; academically, it will more thoroughly embed digital technology in the methods and scope of arts and humanities research. Probing these research issues will also enable arts and humanities academics to engage with a broader range of partners in creative and cultural industries, as well as businesses, on such global issues as intellectual property.

(2) *Translating Cultures*

Relates to: Connected Communities, Global Uncertainties

Core research issues: Translation here is conceived broadly. While translations from one language to another would form an important part of the research that could undertaken within this thematic area, 'translation' also refers more broadly to cultural exchange and transmission in a variety of circumstances and periods, including communication and miscommunication; multiculturalism; the translation of the past into the present; the translation of ideas from one culture to another; translations of one media to another or one discipline to another. Language and languages play a major role in this theme; the power of language, rhetoric, new languages, endangered languages and how languages are interpreted can all be encompassed within it.

Impacts: research findings in this area could have a direct impact on museums and galleries, global businesses, government departments, professionals working in diplomacy, policymakers, publishers, translators, NGOs, security, the armed forces (and others who deal with conflict situations), development professionals. It will have particular impacts in sustaining research in language-based disciplines which are threatened by the decline in language teaching, and which are crucial to areas of the national economy and security.

(3) *Care for the Future*

Relates to: Connected Communities, Living with Environmental Change

Core research issues: This theme offers significant arts and humanities input into the area of sustainability. In the context of the collapse of trust, the abdication of responsibility and loss of civility that characterises contemporary public life, research in this area could contribute to a paradigm shift towards a future-facing ethical, moral, cultural and social landscape. Research in this area will consider what communities and individuals value, why they value it, how they value it, and how values are defined, identified and transmitted. It will help raise awareness of issues such as responsibility, care versus competition, sustaining the environment, and quality of life. This theme also engages with the relationship between the past, present and future: how the past is understood, narrated and reconceived; how time is understood, and what role utopian visions play in ideological, ethical and moral decision-making.

Impacts: engagement with government departments, community groups (including ethnic minorities), the private sector, the heritage sector (including natural, built and intangible heritage) and childcare professionals among others could help promote engagement with the significant intellectual, cultural and ethical issues that will be researched here. It will enable closer connections to be made between arts and humanities research, law and public policy formation.

(4) The Art of Science: Knowledge and Creativity

Relates to: does not directly relate specifically to any current cross-Council themes but has broad implications for the public understanding of science, which is of relevance for all of the themes.

Core research issues: This theme would be distinguished from arts/science programmes that have been supported in the past by, for example, the Wellcome Institute and Arts Council England, in that science as a system of knowledge and the public understanding of science will be examined primarily from an arts and humanities perspective. Research in this area will investigate fundamental concepts of knowledge, discovery, creativity, innovation, imagination and curiosity. It could consider the role of the expert and expertise; technologies of creativity; the history of science; the relationship between scientific and religious world views; arts and humanities interface

with neuroscience; methods of discovery and argumentation; scientific and medical ethics; and common and conflicting values. Indicative research questions include: what might science and arts and humanities learn from each other? What does it mean to be a creative scientist? What do the arts and humanities - and the methodologies and practices of research in the arts and humanities - do that science does not or cannot do? How might the arts and humanities help define the nature, value and limits of scientific knowledge?

Impacts: the impact in this area will largely be in providing a sharper set of concepts to assist in the public understanding of science. It will encourage closer collaboration between researchers in the sciences and the humanities, and will aim to raise the level of public debate on sensitive issues of science policy.