

I recently held a workshop with a group of exceptionally bright AHRC-funded Ph.D. students. I asked them what they valued about their research experience, what they gained from it and how they felt this contributed to their career aspirations. All of them affirmed the pleasurable freedom of working on their own, and having the time to explore ideas of considerable significance and to produce a substantial piece of writing. They also expressed their appreciation of opportunities to undertake purposeful collaboration—whether working with a team on a funded research project, organising a seminar or exhibition, or co-writing an article with their supervisor. When I asked if any of them thought of themselves as a 'lone scholar', my question was met with bewilderment.

There is absolutely no question that high quality research in the arts and humanities requires time away from the relentless pressures of teaching and administration. However, what this rising generation of scholars recognises is that research has many dimensions and can be conducted in a variety of ways. During the entire life cycle of any research project, it is likely that the research will sometimes benefit from collaboration and at other times from the hours of solitude the researcher spends in the archive, pondering their notes, generating often lengthy pieces of writing, or, in the case of practice-led researchers, producing or composing.

George Eliot's solipsistic Edward Casaubon, who became 'indifferent to the sunlight' in his single-minded attempt to find 'the Key to all Mythologies', or Eliot's source, the sixteenth-century classical philologist, Isaac Casaubon, who was much more prolific than *Middlemarch's* deluded character, are stereotypes of the past. While some academics in the arts and humanities continue to essentialise themselves as 'lone scholars', only a brief conversation with them will yield evidence that they also collaborate with international partners, organise conferences to develop ideas, work with editorial or research assistants, submit their writing to colleagues for peer review, or, at the very least, exchange insights with research students working in cognate fields. The insistence on a dichotomy

between one breed called the 'lone scholar' and another called the 'collaborative researcher' is not helpful, given the variety of ways in which researchers work in the global academic culture of the 21st century.

The recently published RAE panel reports recognise the transformative role of the AHRC in providing a range of new opportunities for research support in the arts and humanities. While these reports praise the positive effect of the research leave scheme in providing time, they also commend the impact of AHRC funding on collaborative research, resource enhancement, partnerships with the museum and gallery sector, opportunities to work with other research councils, postgraduate training, and the development of an infrastructure for creative scholarship. What this tells me is that the AHRC needs to provide mechanisms that are flexible enough to support world-class research however it is done.

During the nine months of the AHRC's consultation on its support for individual research, and in conversations we have had with nearly 1000 academics, there was only one consistent point raised about the research leave scheme, and that was the value of time. The research leave scheme, as the RAE panel reports show, has had a positive impact on research quality in the UK, but it has not changed since its inception in 1998, and it is not adaptable enough to ensure that it will fully serve the needs of researchers in the future. The new AHRC Fellowship scheme will be more flexible in terms of periods and percentages of time buy-out, as well as in the range of additional costs the researcher can request (which might include elements of collaboration or dissemination). It will be decoupled from institutional leave, so that it will be available when the research needs to be done, rather than when leave happens to be due. Its flexibility will allow the AHRC to develop the mentoring capacity of the 'early career' route; it will, unlike the research leave scheme, be available for Principal Investigators working on large collaborative projects; and its format can be adapted to strategic programmes. As we anticipate that this will be a very popular scheme, we will need to manage demand to ensure reasonable success

rates. The AHRC is devoting £8 million of its annual budget to the scheme, bringing the funding back in line with value of awards made before the 2007 reductions. I look forward to seeing some of those intelligent Ph.D. students from my workshop as AHRC Fellows in the future.

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