

Briefing note

AHRC Delivery Plan 2019

Overview of AHRC Delivery Plan 2019

The [2019 Arts and Humanities Research Council \(AHRC\) Delivery Plan](#) is the first plan set out by the council since its incorporation into the newly-established UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) in 2018. It sets out the council's objectives for fulfilling its mission to fund outstanding arts and humanities research, maintain and enhance the international standing of the UK in arts and humanities, and maximise their benefit to the public. In broad terms, the delivery plan states that AHRC aims to enable cultural participation, address contemporary social challenges, and create economic value through its activities.

This briefing note provides an outline of the delivery plan, following its structure. It then details the alignments between AHRC's plans and the National Heritage Science Forum Strategic Framework 2018-2023, arranged according to the goals set out in the framework.

Objectives (pp. 4-5)

The plan sets out nine objectives:

- fund a range of outstanding original arts and humanities research
- promote challenge-led interdisciplinary research internally and in partnership with other UKRI councils
- support skills development throughout the career cycle
- establish a range of national and international research partnerships
- contribute to development of UK cultural research infrastructure, including e-infrastructures
- promote knowledge exchange between researchers and a range of other sectors
- use research to foster understanding of human and cultural differences, embedding equality, diversity and inclusion in AHRC processes
- support broad and sustained public engagement with funded research
- articulate value of arts and humanities research to government and public.

Themes and Enablers (pp. 6-31)

The plan identifies seven themes, along with three 'enablers'. Each theme relates to a particular AHRC research priority while the 'enablers' refer to policies and programmes aimed at facilitating work across all seven themes.

Themes (pp. 6-22)

Creativity and creative economy (pp. 6-9)

The first research priority theme is research to support the creative industries, such as design, architecture, film and TV, software and video games, music, visual arts and performing arts. These industries are identified as the most immediate beneficiaries of AHRC-funded research, and are increasingly recognised as a crucial part of the UK economy, driving economic growth.

AHRC is involved in two UKRI programmes to support engagement between research and creative industries: the Creative Industries Clusters Programme (CICP) and the Audiences of the Future programme (AotF). CICP supports partnerships between higher education institutions and creative industry across the UK, as well as a joint researcher-industrial centre for data analysis and insight on the creative economy. AotF supports research into applications of virtual, augmented and mixed reality technology.

In the long term, AHRC aspires to expand its activities in relation to the creative economy, to push the frontiers of creative research and to demonstrate how creative research supports value production in creative industries in order to be able to better make the case for funding creative research. In the shorter term, AHRC aims to support and evaluate the work of CICP, work with a range of governmental and UKRI partners to identify and disseminate successful working models, extend the work of the National Centre for Immersive Storytelling, work across UKRI to identify opportunities and extend its international activities.

[Discovery research \(pp. 10-11\)](#)

Investigator-led discovery research is a priority for AHRC, as it has resulted in a number of significant successes. AHRC support for discovery research is delivered through open-call funding. AHRC believes that such research is important for revealing future research priorities and extending the frontiers of human knowledge

In the long term, AHRC plans to maintain and enhance its open-call funding schemes in order to promote a broad and varied range of discovery research. More immediately, AHRC plans to increase the success rate for applications to its core Research Grant schemes from 22% to closer to the 50% of applications which are deemed fundable; to review its existing open-call schemes to ensure that they continue to fulfil their function; and to evaluate peer review processes to ensure capability to deal with interdisciplinary funding calls.

[Interdisciplinarity for contemporary challenges \(pp. 12-14\)](#)

AHRC takes the position that interdisciplinary research in the humanities is an essential component of addressing a wide range of contemporary social challenges.

AHRC plans, in the long term, to support arts and humanities research, as well as collaborations beyond this, to help address contemporary challenges including modern slavery, mental health and mental illness, ethics of artificial intelligence, future urban living, conflict and forced migration. Shorter-term actions to work towards this ambition include plans for a Policy and Evidence Centre on modern slavery, major new cross-council research on adolescence and mental health, support for the delivery of the AI & Data Grand Challenge, and support for a NERC-led cross-disciplinary initiative on decision-making for landscapes and land assets.

[Understanding cultural value \(p. 15\)](#)

AHRC seeks to explore the value of culture in all its varied forms: aesthetic, intellectual, social, economic, communal, in its impact of health and wellbeing and more.

In the long term, AHRC hopes to advance knowledge of the multiple forms of cultural value, and their connections with arts and humanities across the broadest possible range of cultural activity. In the near term, it will commit over £2 million to a competitive call for a new Centre for Cultural Value in collaboration with Arts Council England and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. It will also provide transitional funding for the What Works Centre on Wellbeing, and collaborate on a new funding call on comparative approaches to wellbeing.

[Arts and science, arts in science \(pp. 16-17\)](#)

The values of creativity, risk and imagination are held in common between arts and humanities on the one hand, and science on the other. Arts and humanities methodologies and ideas can be valuable in increasing the success of science and medicine.

AHRC's long-term ambitions in this regard are to explore more deeply reciprocal relations between science and arts and humanities, including by mobilising science-facing disciplines, and to continue to catalyse new research across digital, health and environmental humanities, as well as heritage science. AHRC will, in the shorter term, explore how museums, galleries and artistic practice can contribute to public health interventions and amelioration of health conditions; collaborate with Aardman Animations on a digital intervention on mental health problems for 18-25-year-olds; and jointly fund a UKRI Mental Health Network Plus coordinator.

[Global engagement and the Sustainable Development Goals \(pp. 18-19\)](#)

Multilateral engagement with a broad range of partners is essential to the success of UK research. Well-established partnerships are in place with partners in Europe, North America and China, which have enabled UK researchers to draw on even greater funding than the UK alone can provide. Through the Global Challenges Research Fund and the Newton Fund, AHRC has been working to develop equitable partnerships with researchers in low and middle-income countries, including on interdisciplinary projects with other UKRI councils and other partners.

AHRC aims to build on strong foundations going forwards to develop an influential UK arts and humanities research community with a focus on global development. In a more immediate sense, this involves initiating two major programmes funded through the UKRI Fund for International Collaboration, one a UK-US programme on digital research in cultural institutions, the other a UK-China collaboration on the creative economy. It will also mean taking a leading role in commissioning major research on international challenges, playing a full role in UKRI collaboration with the African Research Universities Association (ARUA), developing AHRC's Newton Fund portfolio, deepening UK-Germany collaboration via an annual open call for collaborative research, and laying foundations for further collaborations with international partners.

[Research unlocking cultural assets \(pp. 20-22\)](#)

Arts and humanities research is the key to unlocking the potential of a broad range of cultural assets. AHRC works with its independent research organisations (IROs) on both interdisciplinary research into preservation of assets and innovative discovery research to enable them to be accessible and impactful – intellectually, socially, and economically. AHRC programmes including Living with Machines (with British Library and Alan Turing Institute), Creative Informatics (with University of Edinburgh and partners in creative industries), and the transatlantic Digging into Data Challenge, have advanced the use of data-based methods for research around cultural assets.

In the long run, AHRC aspires to create a 21st-century research infrastructure for arts and humanities, making effective use of aggregated collections; harmonising data, cataloguing and metadata standards; creating institutional support to effectively involve small collections, archives and museums; creating the necessary data storage systems and capabilities; resolving intellectual property and copyright issues; and working towards an integrated 'national collection'. It also plans to seek out resources for major new heritage science infrastructure investment, and to extend IRO status to smaller and non-metropolitan institutions. More immediately, work towards these ambitions will entail the initiation of a five-year transatlantic programme on digital research in cultural institutions, a season on migration and forced displacement (with Imperial War Museum) to open in 2020, forging new partnerships between IROs and universities, and seeking out international

partnerships with research intensive museums, galleries and archives via the Global Summit of Research Museums and the International Placement Scheme (IPS).

[Enablers \(pp. 23-31\)](#)

[Skills pipeline \(pp. 23-25\)](#)

Skills are essential to the continued existence and success of arts and humanities research in the UK. Support for their development is therefore central to AHRC strategy. AHRC has created several mechanisms to support skills development, including Collaborative Doctoral Awards (CDAs), Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships (CDPs), Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs), the IPS, and a range of opportunities for engagement beyond academia, including public engagement through the BBC and engagement with government.

Going forwards, AHRC seeks to address the skills shortage in digital asset management and data manipulation in support of its infrastructure development, increase dedicated post-doctoral support for early-career researchers, and create channels for sustained engagement with alumni and employers to ensure knowledge of future skills needs. AHRC will launch the second wave of the DTP programme, increase follow-up on graduate destinations from the first wave, seek new opportunities by examining successful models such as NESTA Crucible to develop interdisciplinary post-doctoral researchers, work with DTPs to identify barriers to diversity in its student population, complete commissioning of third CDPs round, scale up collaboration with Edinburgh TV Festival to get PhD students into television industry, and work with HEIs to explore use of Global Challenges Research Fund quality-related funding to support additional international student cohorts.

[Equality, diversity and inclusion \(pp. 26-28\)](#)

AHRC is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), both internally and in grant-awarding processes. It also funds research into foundational concepts for EDI using arts and humanities approaches. It has spearheaded initiatives which challenge researchers to rethink methodologies, language and assumptions, and paid attention to potential inequalities of power in design and production of GCRF-funded research. As well as supporting EDI in grant-awarding and peer review, AHRC supports research to restore excluded groups to history, to involve people and communities, and to addresses problems resulting from power imbalances.

In the future, AHRC aims to continue to support important research on these themes, and take the lead in making sure funded research informs policies, practices, collaborations, training and capacity-building, as well as exploring findings of its annual EDI monitoring to plan conversations with HEIs and other sector bodies. In the short term, EDI monitoring data will be used to develop strategies to strengthen diversity in persistently challenging areas. AHRC will collaborate with the Royal Historical Society to lead a roundtable discussion building on the Society's report on race, ethnicity and diversity to investigate possible EDI issues with current funding systems, and will challenge itself and its communities to form partnerships more equitably. Additionally, it will use GCRF opportunities to support partnerships between researchers and grassroots organisations, with an EDI focus.

[Public policy and engagement \(pp. 29-31\)](#)

AHRC recognises the importance of ensuring that arts and humanities research benefits society through public policy and public engagement. In the matter of public engagement, it has worked with a range of heritage organisations, as well as media organisations, particularly the BBC. Initiatives in collaboration with the BBC have included Forgotten Female Composers and the New Generation Thinkers programme, which aims to provide training and opportunities for early-career academics to develop media skills and make programmes to bring research to the public. AHRC has

also created the Research in Film Awards to promote the combination of arts and humanities research with storytelling.

The long-term ambition of AHRC is to deepen the relationship between funded research and public policy through strategic partnerships with a range of governmental bodies, as well as to further promote media partnerships to widen the audience for research. Specifically, in the nearer term AHRC will launch its Policy and Evidence Centre for creative industries to inform policy (see above), use social media to showcase public-facing research, create a rich bank of documentary film, launch a fortnightly podcast series with the BBC, develop the Research in Film Awards, celebrate and renew New Generation Thinkers, and continue to deepen policy engagement through its Public Policy Advisory Group and appointment of a Strategic Lead for Public Policy.

AHRC as an outstanding organization (pp. 32-33)

AHRC will strive to be an efficient and effective organisation, to expand the evidence base for the benefits of arts and humanities research, and to measure its progress against the UKRI success framework and its own plans using both quantitative data and qualitative case studies. It will also comply with requirements of government funding sources, conduct periodic reviews, commit to development of staff skills and engagement with its academic community. It will make use of its Peer Review College and specialist subgroups to ensure it invests in the best research, and will collaborate actively across UKRI.

Financial allocation (p. 34)

AHRC, £m		2019-20
Research and Innovation Budgets		91.5
Science Infrastructure Capital		-
ODA		19.3
	GCRF	15.6
	Newton Fund	3.7
NPIF		37.2
o/w	ISCF	15.3
	Skills	3.6
	Funds For International Collaboration	14.8
	Strategic Priorities Fund	3.6
AHRC Programme		148.0

Alignments with NHSF Strategic Framework

The AHRC Delivery Plan aligns in several ways with the NHSF Strategic Framework 2018-2023.

The general trend in the delivery plan regarding funding is towards greater accessibility, particularly the maintenance and enhancement of open-call funding schemes, and the commitment to increase the success rate of Research Grant applications. The commitment to funding for international collaboration is also important, particularly after Brexit.

The delivery plan offers cause for optimism regarding **physical and digital infrastructure**. Overall, it proposes the development of a 21st-century research infrastructure for arts and humanities to meet local and national needs. This includes not only a commitment to developing cultural research infrastructures, including e-infrastructures (p. 5), but also a commitment to seek resources for major **new investment in heritage science** (p. 21), aimed at providing equipment and facilities, building sector capacity, and developing ways to incorporate heritage science data into collections management systems.

The delivery plan also contains measures which support the **development of interdisciplinary research** in a number of ways, reflecting the importance of interdisciplinary approaches. These include evaluation of peer review processes to ensure that they can adequately support interdisciplinary research, an emphasis on interdisciplinarity in challenge-led research, work across and beyond UKRI with other councils and external partners to fund interdisciplinary research, and skills development support for interdisciplinary postdoctoral researchers. While not all of this interdisciplinary work will involve heritage science, the general inclination to support interdisciplinary work offers opportunities. Additionally, the intended AHRC investment in equipment and facilities for heritage science is framed in terms of support for interdisciplinary research.

While the delivery plan does not directly support the Strategic Framework outcome of **increased engagement with heritage science at school age**, the plans laid out to further public engagement and to engage with policymakers may indirectly benefit NHSF efforts towards this end. Likewise, the general supportive attitude towards public engagement **may benefit NHSF's citizen heritage scientist efforts**.

The AHRC commitment to **development of technical skills and knowledge** and provision of **accessible training and postgraduate opportunities** is considerable. The section on the 'skills pipeline' enabler, [above](#), explains much of this. The commitment to create channels for sustained engagement on future skills needs is particularly helpful, potentially enabling heritage science organisations to get support from AHRC in ensuring that the skills pipeline serves their needs. The [NHSF Careers Report](#) identifies a number of skills gaps of concern for heritage science, which AHRC support may be beneficial in addressing.

The measures for public engagement through media, by potentially offering a platform to heritage scientists, may aid NHSF in getting people to **recognise the attractiveness of heritage science careers**. It is not, however, guaranteed that heritage scientists will be considered the best candidates for schemes such as New Generation Thinkers, so these benefits may not materialise at all.

AHRC's delivery plan places a significant emphasis on **demonstrating the impact (including economic) of arts and humanities research**, clearly aimed at consolidating and perhaps growing its budget in order to be able to better support research. The plan includes two proposals for Policy and Evidence Centres, one for the creative industries (part of CICP) and the other on modern slavery. Areas where the remits of these centres meet work being done in heritage science, they may provide valuable channels for **evidencing economic impact**. The collaborative call (with ACE and the

Paul Hamlyn Foundation) for a Centre for Cultural Value may also help to develop ways of evidencing the impact that heritage science makes.

AHRC plans to work across UKRI to identify opportunities for application of research in creative and other industries, and to support a NERC-led UKRI initiative on decision-making for landscapes and land assets tie in closely with NHSF objectives to **improve innovation and commercial application of research**, and to **forge strategic relationships between business and research organisations**.

The delivery plan also contains measures to **support wellbeing interventions** in society, another NHSF aim. These include transitional funding for the What Works Centre on Wellbeing, a funding call through the Centre for research on comparative approaches to wellbeing, exploration of the role of heritage organisations and artistic practice in health interventions, and a digital intervention on mental health for young people.

The AHRC Delivery Plan was published in 2019, and can be read in full [here](#). The NHSF Strategic Framework 2018-2023 can be found on the Forum's website, [here](#).

As outlined above, AHRC plans to monitor and report on its progress in several ways, one of which is publication of case studies regarding the outcomes and impacts of funded research. These can be found [here](#).