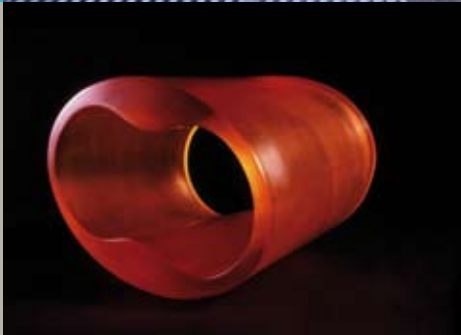


AHRC Vision and Strategy

2007–2012



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Cover images

(Left) Smart second skin dress. Dr Jenny Tillotson explored implanting smell technology into multi-sensorial clothing, developing a living dress as a sensitive 'Smart Second Skin'.

(Right) A 3d web sculpture being transformed in real time with live data from around the world. 'Never the same again always different...Forever' by Stanza, uses CCTV and web cams which offer readily available sources of continuous visual data from our environment and world cities. The Bristol globe version is a prototype for a roving sculpture that traverses the city made from a polymer display. See www.stanza.co.uk

(Below) Shaw Untitled (c) by doctoral student Mike Shaw.

» Contents

The AHRC	2
Chief Executive's statement	3
Strategy for AHRC 2007-2012	4
Strategic aim 1	5
Objectives	5
Signs of Success	6
Contextual issues	7
Strategic aim 2	9
Objectives	9
Signs of Success	10
Contextual Issues	11
Strategic aim 3	13
Objectives	13
Signs of Success	13
Contextual Issues	14
Strategic aim 4	15
Objectives	15
Signs of Success	16
Contextual Issues	17
Our underpinning principles	20

» The AHRC

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) is a UK-wide Non-Departmental Public Body. We receive public funding through the Science and Innovation Group which is part of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. The AHRC came into existence on 1 April 2005 by virtue of the Higher Education Act 2004 and a consequent Royal Charter in 2005.

AHRC is unique in the world as a national funding agency supporting both arts and humanities research. We use public funding of approx £100m per annum (2007-08) to fund research among one quarter of the UK research population. Each year we provide some 700 research awards, 3,000 postgraduate scholarships, and numerous knowledge transfer awards.

» Chief Executive's Statement

This strategy replaces the AHRB/C's strategy for 2004-2009. As a new Research Council, we face a series of new opportunities and challenges. Opportunities have arisen to take advantage of the synergy between disciplines through collaborative strategic research programmes, embedding the transfer and use of research results, to become more vocal in advocating arts and humanities research and influencing policy-making both nationally and internationally, and to enable UK researchers to collaborate with researchers overseas.

This strategy will position AHRC to meet these opportunities and challenges and provide direction for the spending review period 2008-2010 and beyond.

Professor Philip F. Esler

Chief Executive

» Strategy for AHRC 2007 – 2012

Vision

To be a recognised world leader in advancing arts and humanities research.

Strategic Aims

1. To promote and support the production of world-class research in the arts and humanities.
2. To promote and support world-class postgraduate training designed to equip graduates for research or other professional careers.
3. To strengthen the impact of arts and humanities research by encouraging researchers to disseminate and transfer knowledge to other contexts where it makes a difference.
4. To raise the profile of arts and humanities research and to be an effective advocate for its social, cultural and economic significance.

» Strategic Aim 1

To promote and support the production of world-class research in the arts and humanities.

Objectives

- 1.1 Support arts and humanities researchers at all stages of their careers to produce world-class research.
- 1.2 Develop, renew and expand the research base through responsive and, where appropriate, strategic academic research and postgraduate training.
- 1.3 Introduce strategic programmes that contribute to emerging areas of research and pressing national and international concerns.
- 1.4 Foster interdisciplinary research within and beyond the arts and humanities.
- 1.5 Create effective opportunities for UK-based researchers to collaborate with colleagues in other countries.



A 3d web sculpture being transformed in real time with live data from around the world. 'Never the same again always different....Forever' by Stanza, uses CCTV and web cams which offer readily available sources of continuous visual data from our environment and world cities. The Bristol globe version is a prototype for a roving sculpture that traverses the city made from a polymer display. See www.stanza.co.uk

We will know that we are successfully achieving the above aims and objectives if:

- 1.** The number of early career researchers receiving AHRC funding increases.
- 2.** The AHRC monitors capacity in arts and humanities research and takes action where future sustainability is threatened and where new opportunities emerge.

Endangered and emerging disciplines are supported in a sustainable way through packages of long-term strategic development.

Researchers are encouraged to work in new ways and new areas to produce more innovative research.
- 3.** A mechanism is in place to enable AHRC to commission and deliver research more rapidly in urgent emerging and policy-relevant areas.

The percentage of funding devoted to Strategic Programmes increases.

AHRC-funded research is used in policy-making.

Benchmarks for Research Council funding of heritage science research are identified. Funding provision is co-ordinated and led by the AHRC. A new strategic programme will have been launched.
- 4.** Barriers to interdisciplinary research within and beyond the arts and humanities are removed.

Arts and humanities researchers contribute extensively to appropriate cross-Council programmes.

Strategic Initiatives stimulate interdisciplinary research.
- 5.** The number of UK researchers undertaking research with partners in Europe, USA, China Area and South Asia and the resources expended on such research increase.

Contextual issues for Aim 1

1. We aim to provide support for researchers across the spectrum, from the postgraduate student to the senior researcher with an international reputation. We will do so in a context where the research we fund is distributed among a wide variety of institutions, from large universities to monotechnics, in a manner unusual among the Research Councils.
2. We have a responsibility to monitor and, where necessary, take action to ensure the health of arts and humanities disciplines. We will support new and emerging areas, and ensure that research and teaching in important established areas remain strong. To achieve this we will provide appropriate research opportunities and encourage training in leadership and management.
3. While the greater part of our research funding will be applied to curiosity-driven research funded through the responsive mode, be it individual or group research, we will continue to develop strategic programmes where there is a demonstrated need or appetite, as determined by horizon-scanning and consultation with academics, government departments, our fellow Research Councils and other stakeholders. We will endeavour to maximise the public policy potential of our programmes. Our recent experience has demonstrated a large appetite among our researchers for the exciting research opportunities within strategic programmes, and interest from policy makers in the outputs of such research.
4. In 2006 a House of Lords Committee recommended a review of provision for heritage science research. AHRC will take the lead among the research Councils to implement the recommendations of the Lords' report and to co-ordinate support for research in the area of heritage science.
5. Interdisciplinarity is the creation of new and integrated modes of understanding from elements drawn from different disciplines. It differs fundamentally from the approach of applying disciplines in parallel that is characteristic of multidisciplinarity. Interdisciplinarity occurs within and among arts and humanities disciplines, and also between those disciplines and others in the natural and social sciences. Its emergence represents a recognition of the fact that many research questions of pressing intrinsic urgency and wide strategic importance are not well addressed within the disciplinary framework of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We will encourage our researchers to engage in interdisciplinary research within and beyond the arts and humanities.

6. During 2005 and 2006, persuasive evidence emerged that the quality and impact of collaborative research were increased if the teams performing it were international. We also began to work with research funding organisations in other countries. Since we cannot engage with every country at once, and with an eye to national strategic priorities, we have developed an International Strategy which identifies Europe, the USA, China area and South Asia as the initial foci of our attention. Our relationships in these areas will make it easier for UK arts and humanities researchers to work with colleagues there by creating new opportunities for research and by avoiding the problem of double jeopardy, the risk that a possible joint project will be approved by a funding agency in one country but not another. Our first major international initiative is with our partner countries in the EU-supported programme known as Humanities in the European Research Area ('HERA'). It involves a research programme focusing on the two themes of cultural dynamics and the humanities as a source of creativity and innovation and is scheduled to begin in 2009.

» Strategic Aim 2

To promote and support world-class postgraduate training designed to equip graduates for research or other professional careers.

Objectives

- 2.1 Work with stakeholders to ensure the provision of world-class training in research methods and in the key skills that postgraduates in the arts and humanities will need for research or other professional careers.
- 2.2 Encourage institutions to integrate their postgraduate programmes with their research and knowledge transfer strategies.
- 2.3 Maintain and promote the health and sustainability of arts and humanities disciplines, especially those that are emerging or endangered.

Shaw Untitled (c) by doctoral student Mike Shaw



We will know that we are successful if:

1. Key skills training is provided to all AHRC supported postgraduate students.

Key skills training addresses career destination requirements.

Discipline-specific training is provided.

Fifty per cent of new postgraduate awards are doctoral.

The rise in doctoral submission rates is sustained from 70 per cent in 2006.

The number of early career researchers receiving AHRC funding increases.

2. The same high quality standards will apply to research students receiving AHRC funding whether through the AHRC's research programmes or the AHRC's postgraduate programme.

Engagement in knowledge transfer and development of entrepreneurial skills among postgraduates is increased through Roberts and Block Grant Partnership requirements.

Research skills outside academia are increased through collaborative doctoral awards.

3. The number of art and humanities postgraduate students that we fund is increased, moving towards levels more equitable in relation to those of other Research Councils.

AHRC allocates funding more strategically, with seventy-five per cent provided through a Block Grant Mechanism.

Endangered and emerging disciplines are supported in a sustainable way through packages of long-term strategic development.

Contextual issues for Aim 2

1. The AHRC is the major funder of postgraduate students in the arts and humanities in the UK. We support approximately 18 per cent of the students who are eligible for our funding and who are studying at postgraduate level in the UK. Our support for these postgraduates is an essential investment in the future health of the disciplines over which we have stewardship. By funding a steady flow of suitably qualified postgraduates we ensure the renewal of the UK research base in the arts and humanities and provide highly trained graduates who are employed in a range of posts in the public and private sector. Additionally, through our Professional Preparation masters schemes, we prepare students for specific professional careers in subjects such as conservation and law. In this context, the AHRC will work closely with key stakeholders to promote the health and sustainability of the arts and humanities in the UK.
2. We currently fund some 3,000 postgraduate students, with 1,500 new ones being supported each year. A more strategic approach to the distribution of funding will be provided through a new funding mechanism which we will introduce in 2009. Under this mechanism, AHRC will have a more strategic role and will alert government and other agencies to emerging issues which require action.
3. Part of the rationale for the proposed change in the way we allocate our postgraduate funding is that open competition does not allow us to have regard for the health of specific disciplines in supporting postgraduate students. The proposed new system will seek to address this issue.
4. The postgraduate students we support find careers as academics and also in other areas of the economy, particularly the public sector. We must ensure that they are equipped with the generic skills needed for such careers. Such skills include intellectual rigour, languages, leadership, international engagement, knowledge transfer and teaching. Following publication of the Roberts Report in 2002, additional funding was allocated to provide generic skills training to prepare students for careers outside academia. We have recently extended this support to include contract researchers and we will develop it further to enhance training in knowledge transfer and entrepreneurial skills. We will work closely with stakeholders in the public and private sector, including potential employers, to ensure that the training that we fund meets their needs.

5. We also support the development of discipline-specific training programmes.
6. The AHRC has a successful strategy for supporting doctoral students. But there is currently no funding mechanism for supporting those who have completed their doctoral studies and are aiming to establish themselves on an academic career path. We are considering two possible schemes to address this issue. We are in discussion with the British Academy in relation to career development. And we plan to develop a programme to assist those who have completed their doctorate in preparing their research for publication or for wider dissemination to the academic community.
7. We have developed a very successful Collaborative Doctoral Awards scheme for promoting interactions between students, academics, and the public and private sectors. We will be looking at ways in which we can build on this scheme. We will also consider ways in which knowledge transfer can be integrated into the strategies that institutions take forward under the proposed Block Grant Partnerships funding mechanism.



Smart second skin dress. Dr Jenny Tillotson explored implanting smell technology into multi-sensorial clothing, developing a living dress as a sensitive 'Smart Second Skin'.

» Strategic Aim 3

To strengthen the impact of arts and humanities research by encouraging researchers to disseminate and transfer knowledge to other contexts where it makes a difference.

Objectives

- 3.1 Make a positive and demonstrable impact on the social, cultural and economic well-being of the UK, by promoting the dissemination and transfer of knowledge produced by arts and humanities researchers.
- 3.2 Develop tailored support mechanisms that enable arts and humanities researchers to engage in knowledge dissemination and transfer, so that their research can make a difference beyond the world of higher education.
- 3.3 Develop strong and sustainable links between arts and humanities research and stakeholders, including the creative and cultural industries.

We will know that we are successful if:

1. Case studies demonstrate significant social, cultural and economic impact of arts and humanities research beyond the academy.

Biennial stakeholder survey reveals that AHRC's research and knowledge transfer programmes are meeting the needs of stakeholders.

2. Awareness and uptake of the AHRC's funded knowledge transfer opportunities are increased.

Case studies demonstrate that arts and humanities research can reach out to audiences in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The range of knowledge transfer activities supported by AHRC is translated into good practice exemplars, with the aim of inspiring researchers and stakeholders to exchange knowledge and learning.

3. An increasing number of partner organisations collaborate with the AHRC to provide new or enhanced knowledge transfer opportunities.

Contextual issues for Aim 3

1. Knowledge Transfer refers to the processes by which new knowledge is generated through interactions between academic and non-academic individuals and communities. This interpretation of knowledge transfer assumes that the new knowledge which is created through such engagements delivers added value for both the academic and non-academic parties. The AHRC does not restrict the range of non-academic sectors that may seek to exchange and apply knowledge in this way nor the methods by which such interactions may occur. Dissemination refers to the processes by which knowledge that is generated through academic research is made available to audiences beyond the immediate peer community. Where methods of dissemination are employed that maximise the accessibility of the research to non-academic sectors this may lead to subsequent knowledge transfer interactions. In this way active dissemination may constitute part of the knowledge transfer process.
2. We are developing means to assist arts and humanities researchers to identify and pursue opportunities for engagement with audiences beyond academia. Our knowledge transfer strategy is to create incentives to support these interactions, and to help identify and break down barriers to them.
3. After extensive dialogue with its research community and other stakeholders about their needs, the AHRC launched a number of schemes designed to facilitate knowledge transfer in 2006. These include the Knowledge Transfer Fellowship and Catalyst schemes. Both have a very flexible structure and recognise that knowledge transfer encompasses not only business interactions, but also engagement with other audiences in the public and voluntary sectors, including museums, galleries and public policy makers. Additionally, we launched a pilot Knowledge Exchange Programme with BBC Future Media and Technology at the start of 2007. The pilot supports co-funded knowledge exchange and collaborative research and development. We aim to build on this pilot to provide further opportunities for our research community to work with partners beyond academia on well-defined collaborative research and knowledge exchange projects, for the mutual benefit of both.
4. During the period of this Strategic Plan we will monitor and amend our knowledge transfer schemes to reflect the evolving needs of stakeholders within and beyond the arts and humanities research community. Dissemination and knowledge transfer will be embedded in the AHRC's research and postgraduate programmes.

» Strategic Aim 4

To raise the profile of arts and humanities research and to be an effective advocate for its social, cultural and economic significance.

Objectives

- 4.1 Improve understanding by stakeholders (especially the UK government and the media) of the positive value of research and postgraduate training in the arts and humanities.
- 4.2 Play a leading role in the development of arts and humanities research worldwide.
- 4.3 Promote and support activities that foster engagement by the public with arts and humanities research.
- 4.4 Maintain our excellent reputation and high quality of service to stakeholders during a period of major organisational change.
- 4.5 Evaluate our programmes and activities in order to increase their effectiveness.



Image taken from Birds, Described by John Gould, Esq. F.L.S. with a notice of their habits and ranges, by Charles Darwin, Esq. M.A. F.R.S. SEC. GEOLOG. SOC. And with an anatomical appendix, by T.C. Eyton, Esq. F.L.S. Illustrated by numerous colored engravings. Copyright The Complete Works of Charles Darwin Online

We will know that we are successful if:

1. AHRC staff manage targeted and effective strategic relationships with academic and non-academic stakeholders.

AHRC stakeholders, including our award-holders, participate in policy-making, policy development and strategy formation.

Evidence supports the positive value of arts and humanities research in social, cultural and economic life, and the AHRC's reputation in adding value in this field.

Public funding available for UK arts and humanities research grows to levels more proportionate to the size of its academic community.

2. UK arts and humanities researchers take up opportunities generated through a wide range of international research collaboration agreements.
3. Public support for art and humanities research increases, as measured by participation in our activities and events.
4. Elements of the AHRC's finance, human resource, IT functions and grants processing activities are moved to the planned Research Council Shared Services Unit in Swindon with no drop in service or quality of delivery of core business.

One hundred per cent of applications are processed electronically.

Academic community satisfaction survey demonstrates ninety per cent good or very good satisfaction with the AHRC services.

Staff survey results show that within the AHRC office standards of good management practice, communication, leadership, morale and motivation are maintained.

Creative approaches to the delivery of core business maximise the proportion of funding going towards research.

5. Schemes meet user requirements and schemes that are no longer fit for purpose are withdrawn. We have an established portfolio of wide-ranging case studies of the use of AHRC funded research in the development of public policy.

Contextual issues for Aim 4

1. Our stakeholders include academics and non-academics, public sector and private sector businesses with an interest in arts and humanities areas, government, media and the general public.
2. We are increasingly viewed by national funding agencies abroad as desirable partners for international research collaboration. Our strengths as a collaborator include these:
 - We are unique in covering both the arts and the humanities
 - We have a larger budget than other non-UK agencies
 - We fund world-class research
 - We use a high-calibre peer review process
 - Our programmes are innovative and ambitious in both range and quality, encompassing research, postgraduate training and knowledge transfer
 - Working with other national agencies enhances our capacity to shape the development and delivery of policies that affect the sector.
3. Our international leadership ambition lies initially in Europe and is directed towards the successful establishment of HERA ('Humanities in the European Research Area') and effective collaboration with the European Research Council. We are also approached by agencies from across the world that seek to replicate the support we have gained for our sector and our peer review processes. Interacting with them encourages greater UK-international research collaboration through efficient international peer review. Our agreement in 2006 with the National Science Foundation in the USA is one example of the innovative and ambitious reach of our international strategy. It enables UK and US researchers to collaborate more freely with each other without the barrier of double jeopardy.
4. The Research Councils have a commitment to encourage public understanding of and engagement with research. The AHRC does this alongside the other Research Councils, HEFCE and the Wellcome Trust through new Beacons of Public Engagement, the RCUK Science in Society Unit and our own events programme. We need to communicate the findings of arts and humanities academics to the public and to create public dialogue on arts and humanities research. Arts and humanities insights and perspectives can also help the natural and social sciences to engage with the public.



Latvia Tex by Jennifer Shellard from her project Light Cloth, investigating dynamic interrelations between light and fabric.

- 5.** The AHRC is undergoing significant organisational changes. We will co-ordinate these through a programme entitled "Forging our Future". Its projects include the development of a Shared Services Centre with the other Research Councils by 2009, which will have an impact on the way that applications are submitted, processed and paid, and potentially the physical re-location of AHRC offices post SSC; the replacement of our Postgraduate Competition with a more strategic means of funding postgraduates; a review of our decision-making structures; and embedding knowledge transfer and international collaboration more comprehensively within our programme activities. Providing a good-quality service and ensuring our core business is maintained will be a challenge over this period.
- 6.** To continue making a good case for public funding for arts and humanities research and to maintain our position in the wider research sector, we need more evidence of the value of arts and humanities research and of the capacity of our programmes to help generate that value. We will implement an ambitious plan of activities to produce this evidence. We will depend on members of the arts and humanities research community to provide evidence and case studies and to take an active role in public and policy engagement.

» Our underpinning principles

1. World-class research embodies the highest possible standards of scholarship, originality, quality and significance, and embraces critical and creative practice, collaboration with international partners, productivity and the best methods of dissemination and knowledge transfer.
2. The researchers we support are committed to producing world-class research for its intrinsic value, to teaching and supervising students and, where appropriate, to the dissemination and transfer of their research outputs into other contexts where they will be of use.
3. Research, postgraduate training, knowledge transfer and public advocacy in the arts and humanities each raise distinctive issues, but they are closely interlinked. Success in each of these activities strengthens our efforts in all of them.
4. We rely upon the rigorous examination of applications for research funding by peer reviewers to ensure that we support world-class research, and of applicants for postgraduate training by their potential supervisors to ensure that we are producing the best future academics and professionals in the arts and humanities.
5. Our public and stakeholders include academics, policy-makers, and people in business and the non-profit sector who use the outcomes of arts and humanities research. We actively engage with stakeholders in the development and delivery of our activities.
6. We work closely with the other Research Councils within the framework of RCUK in the delivery of interdisciplinary programmes and in the efficient harmonisation of our systems and processes, while also recognising and advocating the distinctive features and requirements of arts and humanities research.
7. We are committed to collaborating with the Higher Education Funding Councils, the British Academy and with other agencies in the UK and abroad that support arts and humanities research.
8. In delivering our programmes, we seek to operate in a cost-effective and efficient manner that ensures value for money and high standards of service to the academic community and others with whom we interact.
9. Our ethos is open, approachable and responsive, in relation to applicants and award holders, to other stakeholders and to our own highly committed staff.



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