HAPPY BIRTHDAY BRUNEL! HOW AHRC FUNDING IS BRINGING US CLOSER TO THE ENGINEERING GENIUS

Making the most of Knowledge Transfer in the Arts and Humanities

News: AHRC award-holder hits the big screen

A showcase of research funded by the AHRC
Editor’s Column

IT MAY SEEM hard to believe, but this issue of Podium coincides with the first anniversary of the AHRC. A lot has happened in that time. We’ve welcomed a new Chief Executive, and recognised a number of academic analogues, whose research staff can apply for funding in the same way as researchers in universities. This issue also reveals that we are making some changes to our schemes, as we strive to make sure that they remain effective.

The AHRC is also improving its provision for Knowledge Transfer, promoting the many ways in which arts and humanities research can be applied to areas of life where it can make a difference. With the establishment of a Research Exchange Network earlier this year, we hope to make it easier for researchers to share their knowledge and make links with business. The Network Manager, Lisa Mooney-Smith, reveals more on pages 5-6.

But it’s not only the AHRC’s birthday that we are celebrating in this issue. As engineering pioneer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel celebrates his 200th anniversary this year, Dr Mark Horton, of the University of Bristol reveals how funding from the AHRC is bringing us all closer to the engineering genius.

In showcase, we take a look at the range of research funded by the AHRC, from a series of workshops to explore whether Britain can embrace cultural difference to become a truly plural community, to the latest in playground design. There’s also a round-up of the latest information for applicants, and details of forthcoming events organised both by the AHRC, and by the researchers we fund.

Kathryn Willey, Editor, Podium

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The views expressed in articles in Podium are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Contacts

If you would like to request further copies of Podium, or for Press enquiries, please contact the Communications department: tel: 0117 987 6777 email: communications@ahrc.ac.uk

For Advanced Research enquiries: tel: 0117 987 6666, email: l.hodge@ahrc.ac.uk; or k.witcomb@ahrc.ac.uk

For Postgraduate enquiries: tel: 0117 987 6543, email: pgenquiries@ahrc.ac.uk

For General enquiries: tel: 0117 987 6500, email: enquiries@ahrc.ac.uk

Arts and Humanities Research Council
Whitefriars
Lewins Mead
Bristol BS1 2AE
www.ahrc.ac.uk
Top History Award for AHRC Centre Director

PROFESSOR LISA JARDINE, Director of the AHRC Centre for Editing Lives and Letters, is celebrating after winning the 2006 Norton Medlicott Medal from the Historical Association. The award is given for services to history, and previous winners include Magnus Magnusson, Lady Antonia Fraser and Dr David Starkey. “I am particularly delighted to be the recipient of the Norton Medlicott Medal in the Historical Association’s Centenary year,” says Professor Jardine. “The Historical Association plays an important part in encouraging the public debate about the importance of the nation’s past, and in supporting the discipline of history in our secondary schools.”

New funding opportunities for UK Museums and Galleries

FROM APRIL, SOME of the UK’s most prestigious museums, galleries, libraries and archives can apply for research funding from the AHRC. The eight organisations that will be recognised as ‘academic analogues’ include the National Portrait Gallery, the Tate, and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

Until now, only staff working at the UK’s Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been eligible to apply for research funding from the AHRC. The creation of these academic analogues means that money will now be available to help support the wide range of research activities taking place in museums and galleries.

“A great deal of high quality research is founded on the unique resources and expertise of the UK’s museums, galleries, libraries and archives”, explains Chris Millward, the AHRC’s Associate Director of Research. “The research informs the presentation and interpretation of collections, and provides an important route for arts and humanities research to be communicated to a wider public.”

Collaboration for Doctoral Students

THE LATEST SUCCESSFUL Collaborative Doctoral Awards have now been announced. The scheme is designed to provide opportunities for PhD students to gain first hand experience of work outside an academic environment. The support provided by both an academic and non-academic supervisor enhances the employment-related skills and training a research student gains during the course of their award.

At the same time the studentships encourage and establish links that can have benefits for both collaborating partners, providing access to resources and materials, knowledge and expertise that may not otherwise have been available and also provide social, cultural and economic benefits to wider society. Successful projects in this round range from an exploration of how to promote and protect the human rights of the elderly, to an investigation of the construction of football’s consumer culture.

Award Holder Hits the Big Screen

AHRC-FUNDED MASTER’S student Chris Hooper is attracting critical acclaim after the film he produced for his dissertation won first prize in the drama category at the Exposures film festival in Manchester. This success led the British Council to select the film to be promoted at film festivals around the world. Stung follows an eccentric beekeeper as she reminisces about her youth, and has also been screened at the National Film Theatre and on BBC 2. “I’ve been really overwhelmed by the success of my graduate film”, says Chris, who was studying at Canterbury Christ Church University. “I am forever in the debt of the AHRC. Without its support I would never have been able to afford to do postgraduate work.”

Transatlantic Links for the AHRC

THE AHRC HAS joined forces with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the American Library of Congress (LoC) in a new scholarship scheme which provides the opportunity for postgraduate students to travel to Washington DC and work for a sustained period in the LoC. Six scholarships were awarded at the beginning of this year, enabling the students to have access to a wide variety of internationally renowned collections. The scheme is now being expanded, and another 20 students will be heading to America later this year.
April 9th 2006 is the 200th birthday of Isambard Kingdom Brunel, perhaps Britain’s greatest and most celebrated engineer. The AHRC has been supporting a major project to bring the archive of his work to be freely available as an online resource.

ISAMBARD KINGDOM BRUNEL was one of the most celebrated of Victorian innovators, whose achievements set up the modern industrial world. His particular genius was to take new technologies, scale them up to a monster scale, and then to persuade a sceptical public to invest, and Parliament to allow. He was a man of massive energy, but also utterly eclectic in his interests and working methods. His major projects shaped the course of Victorian technology from the Great Western Railway, with its tunnels, viaducts and bridges, to his great steamship projects such as the Great Western, Great Britain and Great Eastern. But his life also covered a myriad of other projects, designing bridges, engines, tunnels, even hospitals. Even now, we do not have a full understanding of everything that he built or designed.

His archive has been built up at the University of Bristol since 1950, when his granddaughter Lady Celia Noble donated the core. Further donations and acquisitions have resulted in some 33,000 pages of plans, sketchbooks notebooks, diaries and letters, as well as some material items such as rulers and drawing instruments. This is very much his private archive – of his working methods and his dealing with the outside world. Elsewhere can be found the finished plans of railways and bridges (for example, still used by the Network Rail, or in the National Archives). The importance of the Bristol papers are that here we can understand Brunel the man and his working methods.

It is his sketchbooks and notebooks that are most revealing. These were filled up on a daily basis, and give a real insight into how his basic ideas developed over time. We can find rough sketches of his massive Great Eastern steam ship, as he worked out the lines and capacity. Nearby we find architectural details of stations, hotels, workshops, or cast iron fittings for platforms, portal designs for tunnels, or of particular machines. His notebooks are equally eclectic, as he was constantly on the move, from one project to another, but always snatching a few moments to work out an idea or do a calculation on some other project. His letters home to his wife give a human touch of the years of travel and his particular genius was to take new technologies, scale them up to a monster scale, and then to persuade a sceptical public to invest.

“His particular genius was to take new technologies, scale them up to a monster scale, and then to persuade a sceptical public to invest.”

Dr Mark Horton Head of Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Bristol
The debate with Brunel was quite easy to make, because in the end, his life’s output touched so much of society, and so substantial remains the interest in his achievements.

constant discomfort, staying in cold wayside inns as he travelled on horseback, fully realising that in due course his projects would transform the way we travel. A recently discovered notebook gives another aspect to Brunel, as the family man, planning his own garden at Watcombe, near Torquay, in the same meticulous detail as he laid out the Great Western Railway.

All this of course poses particular problems for the historian and industrial archaeologist. The 33,000 pages cannot be neatly catalogued, as he moves from idea to project to place in a bewildering manner across the page. Clerks have copied some of his letters out, but his notebooks and diaries remain in a very flat hand that takes a lot to read accurately. As his health deteriorated, or as he wrote on the move, the handwriting becomes ever more difficult to read. His sketches were often in pencil on a graph paper backing, and are faded and indistinct. Even more annoyingly, he rarely states what actually he is drawing, and it requires informed guesses to identify the project from what was actually built in the end.

The AHRC digitization project has sought to make much of this material assessable, through creating visual images of as many of the papers as possible. We were able to achieve this, at relatively low cost through using the increasingly available digital camera technology (we in fact used a Nikon D100), tethered to a PC system, with images captured in full colour at the highest resolution. We were particularly anxious to ensure that we used open source software for the associated database, which was linked through to the individual images. Through a web-based front end, it will be possible to either search for particular projects or place names, or simply to browse through his sketchbooks, as if in the library itself. We have even tried wherever possible to provide links through grid co-ordinates to other resources such as online mapping and air photography, making it possible to locate a particular feature on the ground. The images on the web are all downloadable as jpegs, and can be scaled up to look at particular details. Behind the web, we are also storing all the images at a much higher resolution, which might be needed for publication and really detailed work. The plan is currently to have the sketchbooks, the letters and his diary, with a transcription available through the AHDS, as well as online through the University during the early summer.

It is often difficult to judge what sort of archives need to be available online, as clearly every document cannot be treated in this way. The debate with Brunel was quite easy to make, because in the end, his life’s output touched so much of society, and so substantial remains the interest in his achievements. The archivists at Bristol have a real problem in managing the demand from researchers, as well as amateur historians, students, engineers, and all too frequently television companies’ requests to handle the material. It is clearly fragile and in the long run cannot sustain this level of usage. The digitization project has enabled material to be studied by a global audience. We very much hope that aspects of his work, such as the impenetrable calculations or his financial affairs, which have hitherto not been studied in any detail might appeal to some researcher somewhere! A particularly important part of the project has been to identify what Brunel actually designed, not just in Britain, but also his several overseas projects, to help protect them from demolition and destruction.

It is somewhat ironical that we are using 21st century technology to ‘re-engineer’ Brunel for a modern world. On his 200th birthday, I suspect that he would have rather approved!

Dr Mark Horton Head of Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Bristol, and PI on an AHRC project on "Papers of Isambard Kingdom Brunel 1806-1859"
The real challenge is in providing a resource which is both timely and useful to its users, as well as one which they wish to contribute and return to.
We will be exploring a web based resource as the central means of communication, which will also be the first of three discussion boards during the consultation period, offering a valuable chance to feed into the development process.

Daniel Senise, Tres caminos (Three paths), 1995. Mixed media on canvas, 267x193cm. UECLAA (University of Essex Collection of Latin American Art) The UECLAA Online (www.ueclaa.org) catalogue was launched in 2005 with the support of the AHRC Resource Enhancement scheme.

We realise a web based network often acts as a practical, and somewhat predictable, structure in which certain forms of networking can be facilitated. It also serves a distinct purpose in bringing a large and often disparate community to one place for a moment in time, but the real challenge is in providing a resource which is both timely and useful to its users, as well as one which they wish to contribute and return to. An environment with connectivity as its primary objective can be created fairly easily, but it will be creating the pre-conditions in which a network can thrive that will ensure its value. These pre-conditions relate to how the movement of pertinent and timely intelligence can be achieved between peers, how quality methods and case studies are sourced and made accessible, and how we develop a high quality repository of resources that support increased debate, as well as awareness, around what the exchange of research knowledge actually entails.

Social or peer networks are often a good example of how, through a shared and distinct repertoire, users can shape and tailor a resource to their specific needs. As the quality of information, tools and tactics in a network improves, so does the size and capability of the community. It is to this end that we are wishing to consult at the outset with our research community to ensure we are shaping a resource fit for its users, as well as purpose.

In the next six months we will be reporting back on the progress of consultations and web developments, with a view to piloting a small networked site towards the end of the year. In the mean time we are also planning a one day conference where we hope to share the outcomes of consultation with our community, and look to exciting ways in which the Network may be supported to grow.

There are many challenges ahead to get this right, not only in practical terms, but also in developing overarching ambitions like the need for a shared or common language in which knowledge transfer may be de-mystified and made pertinent to our research. Questions need to be asked as to whether our Network would wish to expand in the future to include a wider, more international community of users, or how far do we wish to open our community up to non academic parties and those keen to collaborate with researchers? These are challenges and questions we wish to debate and shape with you, so if you would like to get involved, or contribute to REN activity generally, then please do get in touch and we’ll ensure you are included in future dialogue and events, as well as becoming a member as soon as possible!

Lisa Mooney Smith
AHRC Research Exchange Network Manager

Lisa Mooney Smith previously worked as the Research and Business Development Manager at the University of Nottingham, and will be based at the University’s Humanities Research Centre, which is part-funding the post, for the duration of the project. Please direct any enquiries to Lisa at l.mooney-smith@ahrc.ac.uk.
Londoners and the Law

LITIGATION IN THE middle ages – as today – was a popular, if sometimes controversial, method of achieving results, whether in trade, local society or domestic life. Vast numbers of surviving records show that, despite being satirized by writers of the period, the law was becoming ever more important as a tool for individuals and groups. With the help of a research grant from the AHRC, Dr Matthew Davies, of the Centre for Metropolitan History at the School of Advanced Study, is preparing to launch a project to analyse these records and make them more widely available over the internet.

“This extensive body of material has often been avoided by historians because it is so unwieldy”, explains Dr Davies. “But it is of vital importance for understanding how the common law was perceived and used during late-medieval England. From settling unpaid bills, to disputes over runaway servants and apprentices, as well as personal and familial rivalries, the records shed light on how the law affected all aspects of everyday life.”

Dr Davies and his team will begin by creating a database identifying law suits brought by and against Londoners between 1399 and 1509, recorded in the records of the Court of Common Pleas. One aim of the project is to explore the links between the city and the regions as reflected in disputes over commercial and other transactions. The data from the project will be available on British History Online, alongside other important resources for the history of London, at www.british-history.ac.uk.

Contact: Dr Matthew Davies: matthew.davies@sas.ac.uk, tel: 020 7862 8790.

A new approach to public playgrounds

THE RECENT INTRODUCTION of goggles to play areas has revealed society’s concerns about playground safety. In order to help local authorities and parents to overcome these concerns, playground maker Timberplay Ltd, is working with the University of Sheffield in an innovative Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP), which aims to promote the value of play in natural environments. The AHRC is jointly funding the KTP, along with the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

As Helen Woolley of Sheffield’s Department of Landscape explains, “The idea for the project started from a very small pebble but we are hoping to revolutionise playground environments.” Timberplay is now seeking to provide a complete package, involving local communities and buyers in the design process.

This KTP represents a unique opportunity to put theory into practice in a meaningful way. A KTP Associate from the University of Sheffield will conduct research on behalf of Timberplay and bring academic knowledge on landscape architecture into the company.

“We are delighted to have received funding for this project and we believe that exciting opportunities will come out of it. It is revolutionary for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to make use of academic expertise and the University of Sheffield will also benefit from such exposure” says Woolley.

Contact: Helen Woolley: h.woolley@sheffield.ac.uk, tel: 0114 222 0608.
Dowries, Gifts and Rituals of Exchange

WHAT DOES A sixteenth-century lace shoe say to you? Probably not as much as it does to Sarah Bercusson. A doctoral student at Queen Mary, University of London, Bercusson will be working closely with the Victoria and Albert Museum’s extensive collection in a collaboration funded by the AHRC. Investigating themes that cross geographical and chronological boundaries, her research has grown out of the museum’s major redisplay of its Medieval and Renaissance galleries.

Bercusson explains, “In studying the kinds of objects exchanged between élite women in the courts of Renaissance Europe, ranging from jewels to perfume bottles and mirrors, I hope to trace the patterns of consumption within the broader framework of patronage and women’s efforts to wield political and diplomatic power.”

In a valuable contribution to the field of Renaissance Studies, the project will look at how mute objects communicated ideas and added to contemporary understanding of different cultures. At a time when women travelled across Europe as brides and as part of diplomatic parties, it will also encompass the social history of the gift and the conventions regulating formal and informal exchange. Afforded the chance to work with curators and conservators, the conclusions of the project will help to inform future displays at the museum, as well as giving Bercusson invaluable experience of the curatorial issues involved in conveying complex ideas to a wide public.

Contact: Sarah Bercusson: sarahbercusson@hotmail.com.

Reviewing the actress

THE CULT OF celebrity may seem like a modern phenomenon, but for hundreds of years, the lives of actors and actresses have fascinated the people who watched them perform. During the long eighteenth century, debates about the role of women on the stage were particularly lively. With doctoral funding from the AHRC, Helen Brooks, of the University of Exeter, is investigating the ways in which the concept of celebrity affected the identity of the actress between 1660 and 1800.

“The concept of ‘actress as whore’ is well known and established” says Brooks. “In fact, the ideas of the professional actress as a distinct category, of occupational skills, and of concepts of the professions in the context of the theatre, all went through changes during this period. My aim is to re-evaluate the role of the actress in the development of female occupation and theatre practice. As a theatre practitioner as well as a researcher, I feel that an understanding of the cultural creation of the ‘actress’ is critical to understanding the role of women, both on and off the stage, not only during the restoration, but also today.”

With access to Exeter’s extensive collection of rare eighteenth-century books, as well as the Harvard Theatre Collection and the Public Records Office, Brooks has presented her findings at a number of conferences and in articles.

Contact: Helen Brooks: h.e.m.brooks@ex.ac.uk.
THE ISSUE OF immigration is never far from the headlines, and one particular question which is frequently debated is that of Britain as a multicultural society. There is undoubtedly an ever more diverse range of cultures living side-by-side in the UK, but it seems that political and legal structures are struggling to keep pace with this changing environment.

Dr Gideon Calder, of the University of Wales, Newport, is leading a team which has received funding under the AHRC’s Networks and Workshops scheme on the Diasporas, Migration and Identities initiative. The team is setting up a series of workshops to explore whether it is possible for Britain to embrace cultural difference in its political and legal structures, and so become a genuinely plural community. The workshops will take place around Britain, bringing together academics, officials, political lobbyists and members of cultural minority groups.

This crossover between academia and the wider public sphere is crucial to the purpose of the workshops. "The Government’s decision to outlaw incitement to religious hatred, for example, raises questions about rights to freedom of expression which impact directly on people’s lives”, explains Dr Calder. “Though philosophers and other academics can help in clarifying the issues at stake, these conflicts ultimately need to be resolved by a wider range of citizens in the public sphere.”

Participants in the workshops will engage directly with contemporary debates, such as immigration policy, censorship, and the use of religious symbols and imagery. It is hoped that the diversity of the delegates will enable innovative forms of dialogue and establish new interdisciplinary networks in which the participants will be able to engage.

Contact: Dr Gideon Calder
Gideon.Calder@newport.ac.uk, tel: 01633 432520.

Architecture, tradition and modernity

SIR BASIL SPENCE was one of the most celebrated British architects of his age. From Coventry Cathedral to Sussex University and the Hyde Park Barracks, Spence was responsible for some of the iconic buildings of the post-war era, though he attracted some unsympathetic criticism in the backlash against modern architecture during the 1970s and 80s.

Tantalisingly little is known about Spence’s working methods and sources of inspiration. With the support of an AHRC Research Grant, Dr Louise Campbell, of the University of Warwick, hopes to clarify the key role he played in creating powerful symbols for modern Britain.

Analysis of Spence’s work has been difficult until now due to the inaccessibility of primary source material. His family’s donation of personal diaries, press cuttings, drawings, project files, designs and photographs to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland means that a wide ranging investigation of his career is now possible.

“This is a unique opportunity to accomplish fundamental research into a figure of central importance for our understanding of post-war culture”, says Dr Campbell. “Access to the archive is making it possible to develop a comprehensive documentation of Spence’s activities as a designer, architect and public advocate for his profession. I am also hoping to find out more about the important role of the architect in the culturally and economically buoyant period just after the Second World War.”

Contact: Dr Louise Campbell
L.E.M.Campbell@warwick.ac.uk, tel: 02476 523005.
**Funding for museums and galleries**

THE AHRC is considering responses to its consultation on research support for the UK’s museums, galleries, libraries and archives. The consultation forms part of the AHRC’s integrated strategy for promoting research that involves and engages with these institutions. The strategy will build on work already begun, with the recognition of a number of academic analogues and the provision of funding for workshops bringing university staff together with colleagues in these institutions.

**Postgraduate working group**

THE AHRC has established a working group to consider issues surrounding the allocation of its postgraduate funding, to explore possible mechanisms for the future, and to recommend a way forward. As part of its remit, the group will investigate whether the AHRC should be seeking to stimulate strategic planning and build capacity in arts and humanities research at postgraduate level within higher education institutions. The group will also be asked to take into account issues of equal opportunity, mobility and student choice. Made up of academics from across the AHRC’s subject domain and a range of institutions, the working group will seek input from across the academic sector. An interim report will be published for consultation in the Autumn, and the group’s final report is due in November 2006.

**Information for applicants**

**Changes to schemes**

The AHRC has made a number of changes to its responsive mode funding schemes. These result from the regular cycle of evaluations of our schemes that we undertake to maximise their effectiveness. The changes include the closure of the Resource Enhancement scheme. Projects to enhance scholarly resources, which may previously have received funding through this scheme, will now be supported in one of two ways; via responsive mode Research Grants if they include a significant research component, and through a new Strategic Resource Enhancement programme, which the AHRC is developing through discussions with partner organisations. Applicants to the 2005 rounds of Resource Enhancement who received an unfunded A+, A or RS grade will have an opportunity to resubmit their applications in the autumn of 2006.

The AHRC also plans to revise the focus of its support for small grants. The Small Grant in the Creative and Performing Arts scheme will continue to receive applications for projects up to £20,000 until the end of July 2006. From September 2006, small grants of this value will be provided as a route within the Research Grants scheme. This route will be open to researchers throughout the arts and humanities, but only for projects that can be defined as practice-led or applied. Full details of these changes can be found at www.ahrc.ac.uk/news/news_pr/2006/changes_to_ahrc_research_funding_in_responsive-mode.asp.

**Scheme deadlines 2006**

**Competition for Postgraduate Awards**
2nd May 2006

**Small Grants in the Creative and Performing Arts**
Any time before 31st July 2006

**Research Leave**
14th September 2006

**Fellowships in the Creative and Performing Arts**
28th September 2006

**Research Grants – up to £20,000**
(practice-led/applied research)
Any time after September 1st 2006

**Research Grants – above £20,000**
16th November 2006

**Collaborative Doctoral Awards**
8th December 2006

We welcome applications for funding within the Networks and Workshops scheme at any time. Successful applicants will be notified within four months of the application being received by the AHRC.

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**Diary Dates**

12th May, 6.30 pm: ‘American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoliberalism, and De-democratization’
The Annual Lecture of the AHRC Research Centre for Law, Gender and Sexuality, by Professor Wendy Brown, Berkeley University of California. Westminster University, Marylebone Campus (Baker street tube), London, W1B 2UW. Reception from 5.45 pm. For further information and to book your free place, see http://www.kent.ac.uk/clgs/events/annual_lecture06.htm, or email a.j.de-jong@kent.ac.uk for information.

5th–8th July: ‘The Afterlife of Memory: Memoria/Historia/Ammnesia’
The AHRC Centre for Cultural Analysis, Theory and History is holding the fifth annual CongressCATH. The major international, transdisciplinary conference will study the dialectics of remembrance and amnesia, the memory of oblivion and the interfaces of historical research. University of Leeds.

To find out more, email centrecath@leeds.ac.uk.

The AHRC Centre for Editing Lives and Letters and the Centre for Renaissance and Early Modern Studies at Queen Mary, University of London, are co-hosting the conference which seeks to recapture early modern lives as they were written, perceived and experienced, and to open for discussion all pre-modern forms of life writing as history, moral inscription, exemplum, performance, story and text. Queen Mary, University of London. More details are available from Alistair Daniel, a.daniel@qmul.ac.uk.

4th 9th September: Computer Law World Conference: The conference brings together legal academics and practitioners from around the world to consider and debate all aspects of Information Technology Law. Hosted by the AHRC Research Centre for Studies in Intellectual Property and Technology Law. University of Edinburgh School of Law. Contact Nadine Eriksson-Smith, n.e.smith@ed.ac.uk for more details.