

AHRC Delivery Plan  
2016/17 – 2019/20



# Arts and Humanities Research Council

## Delivery Plan, 2016/17-2019/20

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## 1. Our vision

The arts and humanities change how we see the world – past, present and future. They open our minds to cultural difference and diversity throughout history. They nurture artistic and creative talent. They help us to understand the fabric of our society, to learn from the wealth of complex and contested pasts, and to question who we are and how we live. They encourage us to think critically about our possible futures.

The AHRC's remit covers almost a third of UK active researchers who represent a large, dynamic and diverse body of disciplines, ranging from performance and practice-based work through to literary and critical analysis through to archival enquiry and archaeological investigation of histories and cultures. What they have in common is a distinctive approach to thinking about the intellectual and empirical basis of the human world.

In the 2015 Spending Review the budget for Science and Research was protected in real terms including the creation of a new Global Challenges Research Fund – £1.5bn over 5 years. Within the constraints of our own resource budget, AHRC will need to invest its resources strategically, to retain a clear sense of its goals and the principles underpinning them, and to prioritise funding for the highest quality proposals. Over the next five years, we will build upon *The Human World: Strategy 2013-18*<sup>1</sup> to advance:

- The most innovative research ideas in our core disciplines through our open call and responsive mode funding streams, alongside more targeted initiatives in Heritage, Design, Languages, and the Creative Economy;
- Cross-disciplinary and cross-council research that addresses major societal challenges – including the sustained engagement of the arts and humanities in the newly-established Global Challenges Research Fund;
- The next generation of postgraduate and early career researchers, through our Doctoral Training Partnerships and other forms of targeted support, with a view to sustaining capability and providing the strongest possible foundations for future enquiry.

Alongside its role as a research funder, the AHRC will play a leading role in maintaining oversight of national capability and monitoring the health of disciplines. To ensure continued success in research for the UK, the Nurse Review recommends a new body, Research UK, should develop greater capacity for horizon scanning and catalysing new cross-disciplinary research areas. The development of an overarching strategic view of UK research across the seven Councils will require the AHRC to continue to keep abreast of developments within and across its subject domains. In conversation with other major funders of arts and humanities research, the AHRC will gather intelligence relating to existing strengths, gaps in capability, and emerging fields of interest, including those shared with other Research Councils.

As well as a good in itself, arts and humanities research is part of a wider cultural system, comprising the UK's artistic and creative sectors, which are among the most vibrant in the world. Much of the work the AHRC supports feeds directly and indirectly into this creative economy – in design, the performing arts, museums, libraries, galleries, publication, and heritage. Indeed, the UK's creative industries are celebrated worldwide – a fast expanding sector of the economy, a major driver of new regional investment, and vital to the UK's global influence and reputation. This in turn is generating greater demand for the type of research that sustains the creative economy by provoking us to reflect on the nature of our times, our capacities and our inheritance. Over the Spending Review period 2016/17-2019/20 we will generate the new knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/publications/the-human-world-the-arts-and-humanities-in-our-times-ahrc-strategy-2013-2018/>

that inspires innovation, places culture at the centre of growth, improves policy making, and makes the human world a richer place in which to live. We will build on the achievements of the last decade during which the AHRC has established itself as a distinctive organisation globally. We will ensure the UK retains its world-leading position for arts and humanities research, while recognising that such research is inextricably international in both its subject matter and use.

## **2. Delivering national needs: research excellence**

### **Research Environment**

Today's research environment is fast-moving. It requires a firm grounding in traditional disciplines and a willingness to think flexibly across disciplinary boundaries. To tackle larger and more complex research problems, it is often necessary to pursue a project over a long period, to build larger networks, and to work in more imaginative ways. Research is also increasingly a world-wide enterprise involving collaboration with academics overseas. With these features in mind, our open call provision will support research which is driven by the curiosity and expertise of the research community, recognising the importance of the freedom to pursue an investigation wherever it may lead, and mindful of how uncharted terrain can often be the richest field for valuable discovery.

Alongside our open call funding, we will support different forms of thematic and interdisciplinary work that build new communities of scholars and new kinds of research leadership. Working with our advisory bodies, and consulting with the community, we will identify new topics of interest, some of which may be speculative and require an element of risk-taking.

Digital technology touches upon all of our lives. New technologies are expanding the ways in which we make and experience culture. They are enabling new ways of exploring and explaining texts, of archiving the past, and of visualising and understanding data and crowd sourcing information. We will keep the UK at the forefront of developments in the Digital Humanities and what it means to be human in a digital age – including the complex issues of responsibility, identity and security embedded in that question.

### **Open Call Research (c.40% of budget)**

We will support enquiry-led research through large, collaborative Research Grants pursuing complex topics beyond the scope of individual scholars. Exploratory Research Networks will build future capability. The Leadership Fellows scheme will enable outstanding scholars to undertake transformative pieces of research and develop new approaches to knowledge exchange and interdisciplinary working. Together, these three schemes will ensure core disciplines are effectively supported, stimulate new areas of enquiry, and grow research capacity in leading cultural organisations. Arts and humanities researchers will also be able to take advantage of partnerships between the AHRC and funders in Europe, the Americas and Asia. The opportunity to build International Co-Investigators into our awards will continue to underpin international collaboration.

### **Thematic and Cross Council Research (c.19% of budget)**

Thematic research requires researchers to bring their expertise into wider conversation with that of other scholars. It draws people together around a problem of shared interest, or an issue of common concern. It also acts as a springboard to participation in cross-council programmes. As the overall level of funding for cross-council research activity is set to increase, the AHRC will equip its researchers with the experience and skills necessary to work collaboratively with scientists and social scientists. Future themed funding will be stimulated by developing new 'Horizon Questions' from an

improved analysis of the research we support under open call funding. In order to focus on those areas where we can make the greatest difference, we will seek to identify initiatives and innovations across our portfolio and to respond to the new directions research is taking.

We will bring to fruition the AHRC's current four research Themes: Care for the Future; Digital Transformations; Science in Culture; and Translating Cultures. Since 2010 each of these Themes has developed new communities of researchers tackling issues which cannot be addressed by single disciplines. We have renewed each of the Theme Leadership Fellows to 2019. They will focus on explaining the overall impact and importance of their Themes; promoting greater dialogue across the Themes; and advancing their own research as part of their Theme.

Since 2010, we have contributed to 10 RCUK programmes, including Connected Communities, led by the AHRC on behalf of 5 Research Councils. Connected Communities has renewed its two Leadership Fellows who will work with the AHRC to ensure the programme leaves a powerful legacy for future research. Connected Communities has stimulated new ways of thinking about research that is undertaken with, about and for the benefit of communities. The challenge will be to share these insights more widely within and beyond the AHRC.

For the AHRC, as for other Research Councils, the Global Challenges Research Fund has reset the context for involvement in cross-council programmes. The new RCUK emphasis on Global Research Challenges will open up new horizons, with some existing cross-council activity potentially developing in new directions or being incorporated within the global challenge remit. Over 2016/17-2019/20, we will promote new approaches to problem-centred and multidisciplinary research through the GCRF, our leadership of the Conflict Theme within the Partnership on Conflict, Crime & Security, and the Urban Living Partnership between RCUK and Innovate UK.

### Priority Areas

We will advance our three priority areas in Design, Heritage and Modern Languages and commission new Leadership Fellows for each. The role of **Design** research in policy, entrepreneurship and public service innovation will be enhanced, as will the interaction between Design methods and problem-solving in the private, public and third sectors. New international initiatives in **Heritage**, following the success of the EU Joint Programming Initiative in Cultural Heritage under Horizon 2020, will secure the UK's place at the cutting edge of this dynamic multidisciplinary field. There is clear potential to connect Heritage with the new Global Challenges Research Fund (see section 3), with regard, for example, to the protection of cultural heritage from the consequences of conflict (Palmyra provides a salutary reminder of the potential for new digital technologies to record archaeological treasures), the sustainability of heritage in the face of urbanisation and climate change, or the role of heritage in helping societies confront difficult and divided pasts. **Modern languages** are essential in our globalised world characterised by migration, international trade and the reality for most people of a life that is more multicultural. Over a half of mankind daily speaks more than one language. The AHRC Open World Research Initiative (2016/17-2019/20), which represents £13m of investment in four multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary teams, will open new avenues for Modern Language research. This flagship initiative promotes the value of languages, seeking to bolster their place in universities at a time when their study in schools is in decline, and sponsoring new research into the complex subjects of multilingualism, interactions across languages, and their role in defining communities and shaping international relations.

## Partnerships

The research we support is increasingly collaborative. We have recently witnessed a significant growth of partnerships across all of our schemes. Since 2010/11, for example, there have been over 1,100 partner organisations listed on over 500 AHRC awards. We calculate that at any one point at least 45% of the AHRC's portfolio is supporting collaborations that are leveraging additional funding. Since 2010, on Fellowships alone, £13.4m of supplementary funding was secured from 53 awards totalling £3.9m – equivalent to a 348% return.

The UK's leadership in the heritage, creative and digital sectors of the economy depends on the strength of these partnerships. This leadership draws upon the combination of historical, religious, literary, philosophical and legal understanding that is distinctive to the arts and humanities. Many large-scale exhibitions have grown out of joint projects between museums and universities, while AHRC-funded research is improving the visitor experience and changing the ways in which people engage with the past across tourist sites run, for example, by the National Trust, English Heritage, Historic Scotland, Cadw, and the Historic Environment Division of Northern Ireland. During 2016/17-2019/20 we will continue to invest in AHRC researchers' wide-ranging collaborations with heritage agencies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, with Britain's major museums, archives, libraries and galleries, and with local, regional and national media, including the BBC.

## Postgraduate Research and Skills (c.36% budget)

The AHRC is the UK's foremost public funder of high-quality doctoral work in the arts and humanities. From 2016, we will continue to deliver highly skilled researchers through the one third of our budget spent on postgraduate support. We will invest substantially in doctoral training programmes and enhance the flow of talent to higher education and to the public, private and third sectors. The AHRC's 18 existing Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs) and Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs) support PhD students in 75 HEIs with over 150 non-academic partners. These partnerships ensure that the next generation of researchers develops the capabilities necessary to deliver excellent research within and outside the academy. In addition to the DTPs, the AHRC's Collaborative Doctoral Partnerships (CDPs) equip future specialists in the broad field of cultural heritage with the skills required to secure the future of the UK's creative and cultural industries. We will sustain our commitment to existing DTPs and CDTs for the final two rounds of recruitment, starting in 2017 and 2018.

Building on the outcomes of recent consultations, we will refine our postgraduate funding model and invest in approximately 10 DTPs and the CDP scheme. Commissioning for the next DTPs will begin in late 2016, with awards and studentship numbers allocated through an open and competitive process for first recruitment in October 2019. Devolved decision making on individual studentships will ensure training is tailored to the needs of each student. The next DTPs will fund cohorts of PhD students well into the late 2020s. We must ensure that their vision for doctoral training is ambitious and fully reflects the future research requirements of universities and the wider economy in which PhD students are employed.

The AHRC, working with HEIs, will also take forward work arising from its joint report with the British Academy<sup>2</sup> – the Oakleigh Report – exploring the challenges faced by early career researchers. We will work with other stakeholders to spread best practice in researcher development. We will continue to pay careful attention to the career development of early-career researchers through dedicated elements in our core funding as well as specific funding calls and other types of training, development and placement opportunity.

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<sup>2</sup> Oakleigh Report: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/project-reports-and-reviews/support-for-arts-and-humanities-researchers-post-phd-final-report/>

### **Knowledge Exchange, Creative Economy and Impact** (c.5% of budget)

From 2016/17-2019/20 we will enlarge our contribution to the UK's heritage tourism (£26.4bn of UK GDP) and to the creative and digital economies (c.10% of UK economy). Since 2012 our 4 Knowledge Exchange Hubs have connected arts and humanities researchers with creative and cultural industries, large and small, to accelerate innovation and foster entrepreneurial talent. They have engaged with 2,000 SMEs and microbusinesses, delivering £4.3 million into 253 projects, with over 140 innovative outputs. We will continue to invest in the creative economy and to connect universities with businesses, involving the Local Enterprise Partnerships and their equivalents. This approach will take forward learning from the Knowledge Exchange Hubs and the Brighton Fuse, Bristol-Bath by Design and Creative Fuse North East.

Specifically, the AHRC will launch a new and ambitious Creative Economy Fund for which expressions of interest will be solicited toward the end of 2016, when the final report on the Knowledge Exchange Hubs is published. We will also seek to make available further support for the kinds of work undertaken through our Cultural Engagement Fund for early career researchers, which allows cultural organisations to benefit from their expertise.

The AHRC's Follow-on Fund for Impact and Engagement will continue to deliver creative impact from previously-funded AHRC projects. Deloitte's (2016) study of this fund estimates a gross benefit cost ratio of £5 for every £1 invested by AHRC. The Follow-on Fund has:

- leveraged £1.7m or 287% return on AHRC investment since 2010
- generated commercialisation benefits of £11.9m GVA (2011-15)
- through 48 grants with creative outcomes generated a gross "well-being value" to UK of £18.9m.

The Follow-on Fund will remain a key element of our Knowledge Exchange portfolio.

### **Public Engagement**

We remain committed to support media engagement, public debate and policy research. The AHRC's continuing partnership with the BBC through the New Generation Thinkers scheme, our work with major cultural organisations, and specific activities such as the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary film festival all highlight the appetite of researchers to reach wider audiences and the desire of those audiences to hear and experience more about arts and humanities research.

Cultural heritage is integral to people's identity, sense of place and values. It forms part of all of our lives. From 2016/17-2019/20 we will fund research that feeds directly into the exhibitions we visit, the music we listen to, the films we view, the books we read, the texts we see performed on stage and the designs that shape the world around us. Meanwhile the arts and humanities actively contribute to intellectual debate and public life. The research we fund will continue to address complex and at times controversial questions of human rights, trust, ethical issues, global justice, belief systems in a pluralistic democracy, and core aspects of civil society are explored across the range of our disciplines.

### **International Collaboration, Global Challenges and Development Goals**

From 2011-15 partners on AHRC awards were drawn from 44 countries and 6 continents. From 2016, we will increase opportunities for international research, including co-operation with overseas funding agencies. We will achieve further leverage from the EU Horizon 2020 programme and Humanities in the European Research Area, and continue to develop international partnerships across the heritage, digital, creative and cultural sectors.

The Government's £1.5bn Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) is an invitation to address in new and innovative ways the problems faced by developing countries: poverty and famine, epidemic disease and global health, the promotion of gender equality, respect for human rights, climate change and environmental degradation, recovery from conflict, migration and refugee crises, and cultural heritage protection – to name but a few.

To address these Global Challenges, the AHRC has an indicative allocation of £26m for the next 4 years. The GCRF is intended to harness the expertise of UK research to deliver international development goals and the type of social, environmental and economic transformations envisaged by the OECD. Together the UK's 2015 Aid Strategy and the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development map out the terrain, with their heightened emphasis on tackling the causes as well as consequences of instability, insecurity and armed conflict.

Basic yet vital questions of what development is, how it happens, and in what ways it can be shaped, need the arts and humanities if they are to be adequately addressed. Many technical and scientific interventions continue to fail for a lack of understanding of their social, cultural and historical contexts and their likely reception by the very people and societies they are intended to benefit. The case of Ebola is instructive. The failure to grasp the relevance of African burial practices in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone in 2014-15 was in many ways a repeat of what had happened in the Congo in 1978. The lessons were not learned.

The AHRC has a strong record of international collaboration. Recent projects supported by the Newton Fund include work in Brazil, China, Egypt and India. It is also worth noting that an important and influential 2013 report by UNESCO and the UNDP highlights heritage and the creative economy as a critical pathway to widening development opportunities in the Global South.<sup>3</sup> To build a fuller picture of the arts and humanities' potential to develop and deliver the GCRF, we have recently issued *International Development Highlight Notices* for our Research Networking Scheme and Follow-on-Fund. During 2016/17-2019/20 we will seek to capture ideas, develop pathways to impact, and identify opportunities for collaboration with other Research Councils.

Topics which are likely to provide an initial focus for AHRC-specific and Cross-Council work include: Conflict, Humanitarian Aid and Human Rights; People on the Move, Migration and Refugee Crises; Global Public Health; Environmental Change; Cultural Heritage and Management the Creative and Digital Economy; and Gender and Inequality. Specific GCRF activities will include:

- Raising the profile of the arts and humanities distinctive contributions to international development goals
- Building strategic research networks to address GCRF priorities by working across disciplines and at scale
- Supporting AHRC researchers to collaborate with academics in developing countries, and to establish international partnerships including NGOs and civil society groups in the Global South
- New targeted GCRF funding opportunities, including calls framed jointly with other Research Councils

### **Driving an efficient research base**

UK research is the most productive in the world. The Research Councils will continue to work with BIS, HEFCE, Universities UK and the HEI sector to promote collaboration and

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<sup>3</sup> Creative Economy Report 2013 Special Edition. Widening Local Development Pathways.  
<http://www.unesco.org/culture/pdf/creative-economy-report-2013-en.pdf>



sharing of infrastructure, data assets and other resources to further raise efficiency and productivity across the sector.

Over the last five years the AHRC has tailored its peer review processes to the requirements of particular funding schemes and streamlined the assessment of applications. We will continue to develop our decision-making processes to optimise value-for-money. Recent changes such as the move to a single panel for Research Grants are an integral part of such developments. Efficiency is also about closer working partnerships between the AHRC and Research Organisations to encourage them to focus on developing the best proposals. AHRC is however unable to fund all of the highest graded proposals. Continued constraints on our core resource budget may require us to consider more specific demand management measures. We understand the sensitivities around demand management. If this proved necessary, we would consult on any such changes with our Council and Advisory Board.

### **3. Effectiveness through partnerships**

#### **Supporting interdisciplinary research**

The UK Research Councils are recognised internationally as innovators in interdisciplinary research. Many other funders look to us for best practice. At any one time, more than 50% of Research Council grant portfolios are interdisciplinary.<sup>4</sup>

We have a strong track record of co-facilitating and co-funding interdisciplinary research, innovation and PhD training – through individual Council investments and through multi-agency ‘grand challenge’ programmes. We are agile in responding to emerging UK needs and new partnership opportunities.

We will now use our experience and convening power to help design and implement the new, multi-agency Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), working with BIS to develop a consistent approach to the GCRF and to maximise the fund’s impact in meeting combined UK aid and research goals. The AHRC is involved in 10 current or recent cross-Council programmes, representing the increasingly prominent role of the arts and humanities in tackling the biggest questions and challenges of the twenty-first century. Research Councils will continue working together to address complex UK and global challenges that require interdisciplinary approaches, such as anti-microbial resistance, urban living, sustainable agri-food systems and data for discovery.

#### **Innovate UK, business and the third sector**

AHRC works productively with Innovate UK, the business sector and the third sector – through thematic priorities and programmes, our targeted investments in the creative economy, and the Networks, Fellowships and Projects supported by open call. The Connected Communities programme has proved particularly valuable in exploring new ways of partnering with civil society groups, community organisations, and local NGOs. AHRC’s success in furthering research into the creative, heritage and digital economies provides a firm foundation upon which to partner with Innovate UK. For example, research led through the CREATE programme – in partnership with ESRC and ESRC – on copyright and new business models in the creative sector is a promising field for future engagement, as further demonstrated by the success of the AHRC Centre for Digital Copyright and Intellectual Property Research in Ningbo in China. Nor is AHRC research only generating new content for the creative industries: it is critically examining the contexts in which those industries innovate and grow. For example, the AHRC’s major report from the Cultural Value Project (2013-16) provides a catalyst for new ways

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<sup>4</sup> RCUK analysis of open data available on Gateway to Research (<http://gtr.rcuk.ac.uk/>), based on active grants in 2014 where investigators come from different departments.

of thinking about the value of arts and culture to individuals and society. The report identifies the components making up cultural value and the type of evidence that might be used to produce more robust and rigorous evaluations of those components.

### **Government departments and agencies**

Policy making in the modern world is complex. Part of that complexity resides in the need to navigate contrasting ethical, legal, religious, and international perspectives. Arts and humanities researchers bring unique skills and distinctive expertise to the work of policy makers. Policy issues, ranging from the local to the global, benefit from understanding the wider historical and intercultural contexts in which policy is debated, framed, and evaluated. Even as the structures of government and policy delivery change, many basic questions remain the same. These stubborn realities of policy making require a better understanding of how we arrived at the situations we confront today, as well as an ability to stand back from the pressures of the present and look in depth at major issues in public policy over the longer term and in a wider global setting.

The Research Councils, with their convening power, are well placed to broker connections between the worlds of research and policy. Over the last Spending Review period the AHRC significantly raised the profile of the arts and humanities across Whitehall, the devolved administrations, public agencies, and international organisations and NGOs. Time and again we were able to demonstrate how the research we fund can inject a vital new dimension to policy development. From 2016/17-2019/20, the AHRC will respond to the growing emphasis on open policy and the professionalization of policy making to develop our policy profile in areas where we identify strong clusters of activity, including: ethics; religion and public life; conflict resolution, reparative justice and peace-building; human rights; international humanitarian and development aid; foreign policy and international relations; intelligence and security; cultural heritage protection; public services design; and regional regeneration and the creative economy.

From 2016/17-2019/20, we will build on our reputation for high quality public policy training and skills development for Early Career Researchers. Over the last Spending Review we launched a very popular and successful course, *Engaging With Government*, now in its 4<sup>th</sup> year, and run in collaboration with the Institute for Government. We also provided additional funding to the DTPs to embed skills and training in public policy. We will continue to support both. We will also work more closely with the Government Scientific Advisers to understand the potential for the arts and humanities to inform policy making in Whitehall and pay close attention to the equivalent needs of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the Scottish and Welsh Governments. We will extend our horizons beyond government to contribute to the policy process and debates about public policy in other ways, including through the social media, policy think tanks, and successful academic policy networks such as History and Policy. The AHRC's Themes will profile and promote policy engagement, such as the joint report of Care for the Future and Translating Cultures Themes with the Institute for Government: *Making History Work*.

### **EU and International funding**

Over the next five years we will invest in international activity where it promises to raise the quality of research, develop the skills of UK researchers, and bring leading researchers together to work collectively in a global context. UK-based researchers increasingly draw on international connections to enrich their work. Their popularity as project partners under schemes such as Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) and UK participation in European Joint Programme Initiatives is likely to grow. International activity, alongside Knowledge Exchange, is therefore a key feature of AHRC funding. We will also continue to provide opportunities for outstanding early-career researchers to undertake overseas placements with major international partners,

including the Library of Congress, the Huntington Library, the Smithsonian Institutes, the Yale Center for British Art, the National Institutes for the Humanities in Japan, and the Shanghai Theatre Academy in China.

We will foster co-funding arrangements and other international opportunities. We will work with researchers to understand their international priorities, and we will engage with the funders of humanities in other countries to raise our profile as a research council and to understand their future plans. We will respond to ideas and opportunities with the greatest potential, rather than focusing on specific geographic areas. Our current International Co-investigators Scheme and our Research Networking Scheme will continue to play a strategic role in stimulating international collaboration and laying the foundations for success in international funding competitions.

### **Engagement with the community and stakeholders on future strategy**

The AHRC's current Strategy runs until 2018. We will bring forward plans during 2017 for the new strategy that will take us through 2020 and into the following Spending Review period. Aside from this formal process of consultation with the community, we will communicate regularly with our researchers through focus groups, the AHRC Commons, a new model for regional events, and enhancement of our current annual meetings with members of the Strategic Reviewer Group within the Peer Review College (PRC).

## **4. An effective and efficient organisation**

### **Equality and diversity in AHRC**

Keeping the UK as a leader in global research means using talent, skill and knowledge from everywhere – and guarding and acting against discrimination. The AHRC aspires to attract and employ people from the widest possible backgrounds. We see diversity as intrinsically important and as a driver of creativity and innovation. RCUK and AHRC are implementing new action plans to promote equality and diversity in our roles as employers, decision-makers and funders of research. We will continue to increase diversity among our staff, leaders and governance bodies by setting annually reported targets. We will implement best practice in recruitment and management and raise awareness of and take actions to remove unconscious bias. We will expect the organisations we fund to drive equality and diversity across the UK population of arts and humanities researchers.

### **Reforming the Research Councils**

The Research Councils together will continue to participate actively in a suite of government reforms involving BIS partners across the UK research and innovation funding landscape. These reforms aim to ensure the UK is the best place in the world to do research, to innovate and to grow businesses, whilst delivering the best return on public investment. They include: reform of higher education; implementation of the Nurse Review recommendations<sup>5</sup>; BIS 2020 organisational and efficiency reform; BIS common technology platform; BIS grants programme. We will work with government and BIS partners to bring together the seven Research Councils and dual support system as 'Research UK'. This new organisation will take responsibility for national research strategy, simplify transactional operations and reduce administration costs. To ensure successful reform, we will be mindful of key principles identified by Sir Paul Nurse, government and the Research Councils<sup>6</sup>. These principles include: commitment to the dual support system for funding UK research; clear delegation from government for research funding decisions and their management; commitment to the Haldane

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/478125/BIS-15-625-ensuring-a-successful-UK-research-endeavour.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478125/BIS-15-625-ensuring-a-successful-UK-research-endeavour.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> For principles see: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/documents/strategicprioritiesandpendingplan2016/>

principles; recognition of the breadth and scale of research investments within and across disciplines. In preparation for reform, the Research Councils will plan and implement internal change and cost-reduction measures from 2016, ensuring that our changes support wider government reforms.

### **HEI sector efficiencies**

UK research is the most productive in the world.<sup>7</sup> The Research Councils, including AHRC, will continue to work with BIS, HEFCE and other stakeholders to promote collaboration and share infrastructure, data assets and other resources to raise efficiency and productivity across the sector.

### **Council specific plans**

In addition to our statement about demand management, we are committed more broadly to the efficient use of resource. Along with our sister councils EPSRC and ESRC, the AHRC has already taken significant steps to harmonise policies and functions in operations related to HR, Finance, and Information Services and we will continue to do so. We must also turn our attention to better ways of working with Research Organisations and to streamlining the process of application. We will make more effective use of digital media in support of, for example, the Peer Review College and in our general communications. We will use evaluation to identify further opportunities to improve processes, including reducing the amount of office-based checks on applications pre-funding decisions. Throughout this delivery period AHRC will regularly assess the cost-effectiveness of its operations and where necessary change modes of working to ensure resources achieve the maximum added value.

### **Evaluating Research Council investment**

The UK's dual support system for publicly funded research<sup>8</sup> provides a holistic and efficient investment appraisal and evaluation cycle compliant with HM Treasury guidance<sup>9</sup>. Playing complementary roles, Research Councils focus on *prospective quality assurance* through rigorous peer reviewed competition for grants, while Higher Education Funding Councils focus on *retrospective quality evaluation* through the research excellence framework (REF). Besides informing Funding Council allocations, REF evaluates the excellence and impact (economic and societal benefit) of university research supported by all funders, including Research Councils. Research Councils also evaluate or audit specific investments and processes, during or after their lifetimes. Large capital proposals require business cases and economic valuation to inform investment decisions and to evaluate benefits realised. We use our own and independent evidence, including REF, to evaluate long-term impact outcomes<sup>10</sup> and performance against Royal Charter objectives.

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<sup>7</sup> Based on article volume and citations per pound invested: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/performance-of-the-uk-research-base-international-comparison-2013>

<sup>8</sup> Dual support: Higher Education Funding Councils provide stable 'quality-related' (QR) funding to support research capability in universities; Research Councils operate at arms-length from government under the Haldane principles (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmdius/168/16807.htm>) and provide specific project funding to named researchers.

<sup>9</sup> HMT Green Book and Magenta Book: ROAMEF cycle.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Research Council impact reports: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/media/news/impact/>

**Financial allocations**

**Resource**

£m	2015/16 baseline	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19*	2019/20*
AHRC Resource	98.3	96	94.1	92.4	91.5
AHRC GCRF	n/a	5	7	7	7
AHRC Total resource	98.3	101	101.1	99.4	98.5

\*indicative funding



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