When I applied for election as a Fellow in the 1990s, I viewed the RHS partly as a body that provided an official stamp of approval of one’s credentials as an historian and partly as a means of keeping informed about the disciplinary landscape of History in the UK. Both of those functions continue to attract applications to the Fellowship (currently numbering 3,023), though they do not—as I now know well—capture the full range of what the Society discusses on its committees and on Council or accomplishes through its publication programme. I’m conscious that I have a much less secure grasp of what the Society means to Members (of whom we now have almost 700) than to Fellows or Postgraduate Members (269 as of May 2017). Six months into my stint in office, and now thinking systematically about how the RHS should best celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2018, I’m increasingly alive not only to the fact that the Society means different things to different Fellows, Members and Postgraduate Members (a blindingly obvious point) but also that Council and Officers would benefit from a much better knowledge of what our membership thinks we are for.

Accordingly, in this newsletter I’d like to highlight for readers a few of the Society’s recent activities and to invite your reflections both on whether we’re communicating that programme effectively to the membership as a whole and/or whether we have the balance of activities right.
On our website we summarize the Society’s purpose under five headings:

- We represent history as a discipline and historians as a group;
- We promote the vitality of historical scholarship through support for research and publication;
- We advocate best practice in history teaching in universities and schools;
- We provide a forum for all historians to meet and exchange ideas;
- We support and encourage early career historians.

Two of the main ways in which we’ve represented History as a discipline in the past half year have been our submission of a considered response to proposals for the next Research Excellence Framework exercise (REF2020-21), orchestrated by VP and Research Policy Committee chair Mary Vincent, and our response—in the same week—to the call for evidence of the British Academy’s Flagship Skills Project (designed to showcase the skills acquired by undergraduates in the Humanities and Social Sciences), orchestrated by VP and chair of Educational Policy Committee Ken Fincham. Both documents are available on the RHS website (http://royalhistsoc.org/news-policy). They do not perhaps make for riveting reading. But hours of investigation, analysis, discussion and labour went into each of them on the discipline’s behalf, ensuring that our needs as researchers and our students’ accomplishments as historians were registered with bodies that hold significant sway over funding and policy decisions. Responses to our REF consultation document on Twitter suggest that early career historians in particular appreciate that labour, thus contributing to the fifth of the purposes listed above—supporting early career historians—as well.

Financial support is central to our promotion of early career researchers (ECRs), as two other articles in this newsletter make very clear. We’ve significantly increased our expenditure on ECR research trips and conference attendance in the past several years, in response to increased need for these funds: your continued membership in the RHS contributes vitally to our ability to support historical research and careers in this way. But we also routinely offer expert advice to aspiring historians, as at the packed-out 9 February 2017 ‘Publishing for Historians’ event organised by the IHR and populated with presentations by four RHS officers. At the request of the ECRs of History Lab Plus, Literary Director Andrew Spicer and I will be representing the Society at a June 2017 ‘Ask the Experts’ session in Durham; September will see the RHS visit Queen’s University, Belfast, where our meeting with QUB’s historians will be preceded by another daylong ‘Publishing for Historians’ workshop.

Promoting the vitality of historical scholarship through support for research and publication, of course, is not an RHS activity confined to ECRs. The volumes of the Camden series and of the Transactions allow us
to put carefully-edited editions of key primary documents into the public domain and to showcase original research by established scholars in all fields of historical inquiry. A highlight of the past few months was February’s annual Aylmer Seminar, organised collaboratively with The National Archives and the IHR. This year’s theme, ‘Strongroom to Seminar: Archives and Teaching in Higher Education’, explored both the history and the current practice of teaching with archival materials (including images and objects), contributing to our goal of advocating best practice in History teaching.

The Society’s two-day visit to the University of Chester in April for a symposium on ‘Putting History in Its Place: Historical Landscapes & Environments’ nicely encapsulates many of our functions. From a poster session showcasing student research to papers by an international roster of historians, we learned a great deal about the state of History at Chester and beyond. In between session we even succeeded in encouraging a presenter to stand for election to RHS Council. All UK History Departments can bid annually for funds to support an RHS symposium or departmental visit—our next one after Belfast is in Glasgow, at University of Strathclyde. These are key opportunities for us to engage with the profession, and for the Society to be of use to the profession. Please do consider applying when the next round of applications opens.

How effectively does the RHS communicate our purposes and activities? How (within the context of a charity managed by historians faced with the demands of other full-time employment and a tiny cohort of paid staff) could we communicate better with and advocate more effectively for the membership? I’m keen to know how actual and prospective Fellows, Members and Postgraduate Members would answer that question.

If you wish to write in response to those questions I’ll be both delighted and grateful. As we approach the 150th anniversary, a pulse-taking of this kind will be of great value for Council, not to mention of great value for the RHS archives! My contact details are below.

Margot Finn

To contact the President:

president@royalhistsoc.org

Royal Historical Society
University College London
Gower Street
London WC1E 6BT
The Prothero Lecture
Friday 7 July, 6pm
Cruciform Lecture Theatre 2, UCL
Professor Simon Dixon (UCL)
‘Orthodoxy & Revolution: The Restoration of the Russian Patriarchate in 1917’

Friday 22 September, 6 pm
Gustave Tuck Lecture Theatre, UCL
Professor Chris Marsh (Queen’s Belfast)
‘ “Woman to the Plow and Man to the Hen-Roost”: Wives, Husbands, & Best-Selling Ballads in 17th-century England’

Colin Matthew Memorial Lecture
Thursday 26 October, 6pm
Museum of London
‘How to Spot a Roman Emperor’
Professor Mary Beard (Cambridge)

2017 Presidential Address
Friday 24 November, 6pm
Gustave Tuck Lecture Theatre, UCL
Professor Margot Finn (UCL)
‘Material Turns in British History I: Loot’
Public history is a young and dynamic field in the UK, although it has deep roots in the academic discipline. Under its broad umbrella a rich diversity of activity is taking place across the four nations, from film-making to exhibitions, digital resources to heritage trails. Much excellent work goes unrecognised, however, and the Society can take a vital role in celebrating work that promotes public understanding of history and communicates a critical understanding of the past.

Working with the Public History Seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, the first awards were made in 2015. ‘For King and Country’, an exhibition held at Bankfield Museum, Halifax, took the overall prize, capturing so much of what the jury was hoping to find. We were impressed by the creative ways the exhibition drew on community participation and by a film that gave visitors insight into how the curators had assembled the exhibition. That this moving, balanced and locally resonant exhibition was put together on a limited budget made the achievement all the more worthy of its award.

For this second round, we wanted to build on this success by adding new categories to the suite of prizes, categories that reflect vital and pressing tasks for the discipline, and so also for the Society. Developing the historians of the future has been a longstanding priority for the RHS, and so it makes sense to extend the public history prizes to recognise student work beyond the conventional essay.

We’re delighted that the Historical Association has become a partner, taking a particular interest in the student awards at undergraduate and postgraduate level. CEO Becky Sullivan gives us her perspective on the HA’s involvement in the public history prizes below. We are also hugely fortunate to have Prof. Tony Badger, the incoming President of the HA, as a new member of the jury.

In the current climate, there is a new urgency to discussions within the discipline about how best historians can...
In many ways it could be argued that public history sits at the heart of much of the Historical Association’s activities since the first branch was opened in 1906. The initial aims of the HA included ‘the encouragement of local centres for the discussion of questions relative to the study and teaching of history’. In some ways little has changed in the intervening 110 plus years, but the engagement of academic historians with the public has gained its own specialist area of recognition: public history.

We are excited therefore to be working with the Royal Historical Society in developing two new awards under the umbrella of their existing Public History Prize. It is particularly apt for the HA to be closely involved with the two new Student Prizes.

The Student Prizes are designed to recognise outstanding work by undergraduate and postgraduate students that tackle themes relevant to public history in original and creative ways.

Supporting the prize and recognising creative, innovative and engaging work from students is of course important and a couple of hundred pounds is never to be turned down, but the opportunity for those students to present their work at a symposium, which will follow the prizegiving, is a vital part of this award in every sense of the word. Many students are keen to engage with public history and to find work in many parts of the heritage sector; having this award and the symposium on their CV offers real opportunity.

Becky Sullivan

The 2018 categories are:

- Museums & Exhibitions
- Film & TV
- Radio & Podcasts
- Online Resources
- Public Debate & Policy
- Undergraduate & Postgraduate Student Prizes

Alix Green

We encourage Fellows & Members to submit nominations for all categories.

Full details can be found at:

http://royalhistsoc.org/prizes/public-history-prize/
Completing a PhD can be a costly business. Even once funding for tuition and living expenses has been secured, money spent on travel for conferences and archival trips can add up over the course of the degree. These costs are sometimes difficult to anticipate; a relevant conference or a new source in a distant archive might emerge seemingly out of the blue, leaving you scrambling for funding. The Royal Historical Society therefore provides a vital service to early career researchers by providing small grants for conference travel and research expenses throughout the year. Applications are submitted online, and, alongside a letter of reference from an academic supervisor, are usually processed within the month. This makes the RHS grants a quick and easy source of financial support at crucial stages of the PhD.

The Society has provided significant financial assistance during my own postgraduate career. My PhD thesis, now nearly completed, traces the development of the increasingly asymmetrical alliances between the English East India Company and rival Indian powers during a period of intensive British imperial expansion, from 1798 to 1818. Drawing primarily on the records and papers of the Company’s political representatives at these Indian courts, I show how the logic and conventions of indirect rule were worked out in practice, and how Indians of varying backgrounds adapted to and shaped these changing dynamics.

The analysis of private letters and journals is an important component of this project, as a counterbalance to the existing scholarship which focuses almost exclusively on official Company records. In my
PhD, I wanted to capture fully the messiness and uncertainty which lingers just beneath the surface of Company dispatches. My search for material took me on a series of journeys, not just to London and Delhi where most of the Company's papers are housed, but also to look at collections of family letters deposited in smaller archives across the British Isles. The RHS generously provided a research expenses grant to fund archival trips to the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the Lincolnshire Archives. I examined the family correspondence of Henry Russell and Charles Theophilus Metcalfe, respectively, two long-serving Residents (senior officials) who feature prominently in my project. Their letters to parents, siblings, and friends contain intimate details absent in official accounts, and express doubts and criticisms of the Company's imperial enterprise that, for practical reasons, would never be disclosed publicly. These personal descriptions have allowed me to add depth and nuance to official narratives, resulting in a richer portrayal of a transformative moment in British and Indian history.

As I approach the end of my PhD, my focus has shifted from gathering evidence to refining and developing the underlying arguments of my thesis. Conferences, workshops and seminars provide a crucial space to test out theories and ideas. Recently, the RHS awarded me a conference travel grant which enabled me to participate in an interdisciplinary conference at the University of Chicago entitled “Lines of Control: Rethinking Borders and Borderlands in South Asia.” This two-day conference brought together historians and anthropologists from around the world specializing in South Asia from 1800 to the present day. As part of a panel on internal and political frontiers, I was invited to present a paper on the policing and negotiation of borders separating the princely states from British territories.

Through the lens of border disputes, I examined the diverse array of competing visions about what the norms and obligations of the political alliances between Indian kingdoms and the British East India Company should be. The conference provided a welcome opportunity to look beyond the court and think about how the agency of populations at the periphery informed diplomatic activities at the capital, and I greatly benefited from the comments and questions of my peers. The interdisciplinary nature of the event was particularly stimulating. I left Chicago with new ideas for my current and future research as well as with new contacts in my field of study.

I could not have taken advantage of this important opportunity without financial support from the RHS. I would urge any doctoral student with an impending conference or archival trip to apply for one of the Society’s grants. The application process is simple, and a small investment in time and energy can result in a significant contribution to the travel expenses which are in many cases essential to our work as historians.

Callie Wilkinson is a PhD student at the University of Cambridge.
When I began my PhD one of the things I was most looking forward to was going on a research trip to the United States. I am a student of nineteenth-century U.S. history, and while I am able to get most of my sources from digital databases, there were certain archives I needed to visit in order to access materials that I couldn't get online.

When I started looking into how to get the funding to do this, however, the process quickly became overwhelming. There were so many potential funding bodies, both in the UK and the US, that I found it hard to choose which ones to approach. I spent countless hours trawling through their websites, trying to work out which offered sufficient funding, when their deadlines were, and, crucially, where my application was likely to be successful. This last consideration in particular was important; as any PhD student knows, writing a funding application is time-consuming business, and repeated requests for references can wear a supervisor’s patience thin.

Given this, I found the application process for the Royal Historical Society research expenses grant mercifully straightforward. At first I was hesitant about applying. Such a well-known organisation, I reasoned, must get inundated with applications – surely mine would get lost in an ocean of other more impressive submissions. But when I saw how uncomplicated the application form was – an estimate of costs, a reference from a supervisor, and a 250 word outline of my research project – I decided it was worth a go. In fact, as it turned out writing the application was a useful exercise in and of itself. Other organisations had called for proposals of 1000 words or more, and I’d struggled for days to write what often became rather long-winded speculations on why I hoped a particular set of sources, which I had yet to read, might be useful for my thesis. But the RHS, it seemed to me, was looking for something direct and precise. This forced me to think about what was really important and compelling about my research project and how to communicate this clearly to someone unfamiliar with my subject. In any case I must have done something right, because to my delight (and surprise) little over a month after I had submitted my application, the RHS contacted me
to let me know that it had been successful.

The money I received from the RHS enabled me to conduct two research trips to the United States - the first to the New York Public Library, and the second to the Library of Congress in Washington DC. Both helped me to grow as a historian in ways that I hadn’t anticipated. Getting to know a new city as a researcher, for example, was a unique experience. To be sure, once the libraries closed I visited iconic landmarks and stood in long queues at museums like any other tourist. But I also lived the life of a regular resident. I stayed in accommodation in residential parts of town, faced the morning rush hour on the train, and bought my food from local supermarkets. My research was like a job; it gave me a stake in the city I was staying in. The feeling that I had gone from distant observer of to participant in American society (albeit temporarily) strengthened my familiarity and sense of connection with the place and people that I study.

The intellectual payoff of these trips was also invaluable. My research focuses on Civil War era U.S. political discourse, and I largely rely on online databases of digitised newspapers for my source base. Having my materials keyword searchable is incredibly useful. But it can also limit opportunities for spontaneity. When I was at the archives, however, I could look at the kinds of sources that don’t usually make it onto online databases – polemical tracts by political oddballs, for example, or letters from congressmen to their mothers back home complaining about the oppressive Washington heat in summer.

Exploring these unusual avenues was exhilarating and I soon learned to enjoy the feeling of not knowing what would be in the next box of manuscripts or where its contents would take me. Actually holding documents written or owned by my historical subjects, moreover, somehow humanised them, and the details I learned about their lives added a depth to their characters that I would never otherwise have known.

I would encourage any doctoral student about to embark on the sometimes daunting process of seeking funding for a research trip to consider the RHS. I spent a few hours completing the application. In return I got a USB stick full of source materials, a deeper understanding of the country that I study, and a renewed enthusiasm to continue to learn more about it in the future.

Alys Baker is a PhD student at University College London.
FOCUS ON: EDUCATION

The East Midlands Centre for History Teaching and Learning (EMC) was founded in 2015 to address a contradiction in higher education policy. On the one hand, national teaching networks contracted in tandem with the funding of the Higher Education Academy. The History Subject Centre closed in 2011 and the HEA effectively ceased to undertake discipline-specific work after axing the post of history discipline lead in 2014. On the other hand, the Cameron governments simultaneously spoke of raising the standing of teaching in universities. The 2011 White Paper promised to place ‘students at the heart of the system’ by ensuring that teaching achieved the ‘same prestige as research.’ The Conservatives demonstrated the value they placed on teaching by nearly tripling its cost to undergraduates and then vowing in their 2015 manifesto to ensure ‘the best possible value for money to students.’ This was to be accomplished by the TEF – ‘a framework to recognise universities offering the highest teaching quality’ – based on metrics often tangential to teaching.

The logic of the government’s actions, such as it was, dictated that ‘teaching excellence’ was to emerge out of competition, not collaboration between universities. Historians at the nine subscribing institutions of the EMC (Bishop Grosseteste, De Montfort, Derby, Leicester, Lincoln, Loughborough, Northampton, Nottingham and Nottingham Trent) took the opposite approach. They recognised that teaching innovation flourished when shared across institutions, that universities’ individual CPD programmes were too generic to cater to historians’ distinctive practices and that the sum created by commu-
nity was greater than the parts divided by rivalry. The EMC’s founding document accordingly identified its goals as follows:

- To improve history teaching and learning in universities;
- To advocate for history education, its value and relevance;
- To create a networking and knowledge exchange hub for history educators;
- To develop impact case studies, public engagement and funding applications;
- To become a beacon for history pedagogy building national/international contacts and networks;
- To engage pre-HE history educators to create a long-term and holistic approach to history pedagogy;
- To develop research and publication in history teaching and learning;
- To become a beacon for history pedagogy building national/international contacts and networks;
- To engage pre-HE history educators to create a long-term and holistic approach to history pedagogy;
- To develop research and publication in history teaching and learning; Limiting membership of the organisation to the East Midlands was designed to encourage face-to-face interactions. A representative from each institution was expected to attend four organisational meetings a year. Every academic historian in the region was invited to annual meetings and sponsored projects and events had to involve at least two subscribing universities: the more, the better. These activities were paid for by a six-figure budget raised through annual institutional subscriptions that varied according to faculty size. The Centre was initially hosted by Loughborough University, which had made a name for itself in teaching innovation since reintroducing an undergraduate history programme in 2009.

So has the EMC fulfilled its aspirations? My answer is inevitably subjective, since from the outset I have served as its Co-Director alongside Professors Alan Booth and Chris Szejnmann. But it’s not difficult to make the case that the organisation has done some good. Seedcorn funding has enabled academics across the region to pool their experience of teaching North American history, indigenous histories, the Russian
Revolution and visual sources. It has supported studies on how undergraduates can use hands-on archival material and whether their seminar performance and attendance improves when assessed on participation. The two annual meetings attracted comparable numbers of attendees to past History Subject Centre conferences. The meetings combined networking, small-group discussions and presentations by speakers such as Huddersfield’s Pat Cullum, creator of one of the first and best placement programmes for history undergraduates in the country. Out of the meetings came new collaborations, the sharing of best practice and an engagement with teaching issues among historians who had not previously considered attending a pedagogy event. On a smaller scale, staff exchanges have enabled academics teaching similar subjects at different universities to visit each other’s classes.

Four ongoing EMC schemes help postgraduates and early career historians at the start of their teaching careers. An East Midlands History Network coordinated by Lincoln postgraduates Rachel Yemm and Abi Dorr is running a series of one-day conferences where postgraduates discuss the process of research and share their findings. Kellie Moss at Leicester has initiated a peer support scheme in which advanced postgraduates like herself advise and coach those still newer to teaching. Experienced staff mentor postgraduate teachers through a combination of workshops, Skyping and one-to-one meetings in a year-long programme devised by Dr Joe Merton at Nottingham. The programme has succeeded in developing a new generation of history pedagogues whose teaching is reflective, informed by research and enriched by cross-institutional collaboration. Finally, a database set up by Dr Nikola Tomic and myself at Loughborough allows postgraduates to register their interest in part-time teaching across the region. It has enabled early career historians to find employment in over forty seminar groups outside their own universities, thereby introducing them to diverse teaching practices and diminishing the role of patronage in the distribution of teaching opportunities.

Derby will succeed Loughborough as the host of the EMC in 2017-19, and among other things will coordinate the EMC’s preparations for the subject-level TEF. The EMC endorsed the RHS’s response to the 2015 Green Paper and particularly welcomed the RHS’s preference for the peer review of teaching within disciplines over ‘proxies that have little connection to actual teaching quality’. The effects of the TEF remain unpredictable. The best-case scenario is that it will encourage academics ‘to think more rigorously and collectively about their work as teachers and educators,’ as the EMC’s founding document put it. Alternatively, it could accentuate the game-playing and one-upmanship engendered by the metrics, markets and managers directing British higher education. If so, future initiatives like the EMC seem unlikely.

Marcus Collins
Since 2011 the History of Parliament has been recording the living, as well as the long dead. Well known for its biographies of Members of the British House of Commons from its origins back in the high Middle Ages up to the early nineteenth century, the History took a decision that it should be taking the opportunity to tap the memories of former Members who are still alive, rather than wait for a hundred or so years before sketching their lives on the basis of traditionally written sources.
Politicians’ memories are an inescapable source for historians, relied on in many political inside stories, and just as many academic books, articles and theses. But it’s easy to be sceptical about them. Few Christmases pass without another crop of autobiographies from barely remembered heavyweights, whose actual historical content is either exceptionally light, or deeply turgid. There are some classics, often the diaries (Crossman, Benn, Mullin come to mind), occasionally an arresting personal story (Alan Johnson, perhaps), but by and large the genre is one reliable for its unreliability and tedium. Much the same can be said of interviews: elite politicians have needed very little help to tell their story in the national or local press or in broadcast media. Perhaps as a consequence, the oral history community has largely shunned elite politicians: the traditions of oral history in Britain have largely, and reasonably, focused on recording the lives and memories of those who might otherwise have been forgotten.

That is understandable; but readers of this newsletter will probably also understand the reasons why long, relaxed, interviews with those who have been Members of Parliament can become an important resource, not just for the history of politics, but for much else besides. The 157 interviews we have so far conducted have provided exceptional accounts of lives and careers in which politics is intertwined with many other preoccupations: service in the military on the North-West frontier as India became independent; a life shared with the secretary of the communist international in New York in the 1950s; upbringings from poverty in the East End to nanny-care in the highest circles; businesses from garden nurseries to PR; and so
on. The interviews do not go back, time and time again, to a small number of the grandest of grandees, but cover as many Members of Parliament as possible, the footsoldiers of politics, and ask about local politics as well as key parliamentary intrigues. They deal with the nuts and bolts of politics – how to cultivate your local newspaper, who was your agent, how to get on with your constituency party, your rows with the whips – just as much as, perhaps even more than, its great occasions. Our interviews are long conversations, recorded by one of our small (and themselves elite) band of volunteer interviewers, who are by now practised at listening carefully, and probing – gently – further. What is said, we often find, may be unreliable: there are frequently-repeated stories, which have become fixed in the telling (we will often find stories written in memoirs repeated word for word in our interviews); there are some shared and often retold tropes and stories (the first day spent in the House of Commons is usually compared to the first day at school); there are silences which we can do little to overcome. But all of these tropes and silences are interesting in themselves; and what comes through most of all, and better than in any other source, is a personality: an accent, a way of speaking and of telling a story, which future historians might be able to interrogate and use in ways we have barely thought of.

We would like to take our oral histories of politics many steps further. We have already begun to do so, with a Heritage Lottery Funded project in Devon, in which we interviewed those who supported the Westminster politicians: agents, local councillors, political volunteers. These interviews gave an interesting insight into the local side of political life and revealed as many similarities as differences. We are hoping to do more, with plans to mark the anniversary of women gaining the right to vote in 1918 by focusing on the experiences of female politicians. As a small minority in the Commons before 1997 their perspectives have much in common but reflect their diversity: from those who fought against the ‘gentle-
man’s club’ atmosphere to those who argued being a woman helped you ‘stand out’ in Westminster, or the wide definition of ‘women’s issues’ that included both Conservative Marion Rowe and left-wing Mildred Gordon. We hope to use these interviews to consider and share women’s experiences in their own words, and to collect further memories from female MPs and activists.

To date, 139 interviews (most without copyright restrictions) have been deposited at the British Library, with a further collection of interviews with local activists held at the Devon Heritage Centre. For more information about the project, including enquiring about becoming involved, please contact Paul Seaward (pseaward@histparl.ac.uk) or Priscila Pivatto (priscilapivatto@gmail.com). There is also more information on the project (and the History of Parliament’s other work) on our website, at https://historyofparliament-online.org/oral-history.

Paul Seaward
Fellows and Members of the RHS need no reminder of the importance of REF, which has long loomed large in the life of academic history departments. As the mechanism for distributing QR funding to universities, it is a vitally important tool and it is in all our interest to get it right. An independent review of REF, led by Lord Stern, was published last year, and reaffirmed both a commitment to peer-review and an awareness of the importance of monographs as research outputs. There was much to be welcomed in the Stern Report, not least the express desire to minimise ‘gaming’, maintain continuity, and reassure academics that universities and units are the subject of assessment, not individuals.

However, it is hard not to see some of Stern’s proposals as radical, particularly the recommendation that all academic staff with research as part of their contract be returned to REF. This, together with the proposal that publications would be returned from the university where their author was employed at the point of acceptance, aroused much debate. These were the two issues raised most often when we consulted Heads of Department and other Learned Societies before our submission to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) consultation exercise on the framework for REF2020-21.

It is clear from our consultations that the History sub-panel for REF2014 worked very effectively. As REF owes its credibility as an assessment exercise to its expert review panels, it is vital to have discipline-specific panels that command the respect of their peers. We comment on the composition and appointment of panel members in the full submission—along with other issues such as interdisciplinarity, institutional level assessment, broadening and deepening impact, and the use of metrics—but we focused in particular on full return, portability, the position of Early Career Researchers (ECRs), and...
equality issues.

While we welcomed attempts to simplify the REF process and make the best use of existing data, we pointed out some difficulties. There is considerable support for the principle of full return but HESA codes, which identify staff simply as ‘teaching’ or ‘teaching and research’ are highly problematic for many staff with more diverse work profiles or career paths.

Unsurprisingly, we found considerable ambivalence around limiting portability. However, there was near-unanimity over the deleterious effect on ECRs, given the long gestation period for monographs and the patchwork of short-term contracts in post-doctoral careers, and the RHS has argued strongly for reinstating portability for ECRs. A further concern around non-portability is the possible adverse effect on small departments, who may be disproportionately disadvantaged if trying to establish new research areas or taking on new staff close to a REF deadline.

It is, though, recognized that there is a strong equality and diversity argument for non-portability. As is well documented, staff selection in REF2014 under-represented women and BAME academics. Recent analysis confirms that REF seems to have had no positive effect on the gender gap, particularly at senior level. There remains a strong perception of a REF gender effect, and ‘game-playing’ appointments that advantage senior men.

The RHS is clearly of the view that staff on fractional contracts under 0.5 FTE should not be eligible for REF. It is clear that gender bias has been a real issue through various REF exercises, all of which have employed portability. The position for BAME academics, which appears to be even worse, makes addressing the issue of equality and diversity still more urgent.

A main principle of the Stern Review was the decoupling of staff and outputs, so that each department would submit a number of outputs, currently calculated at two per FTE. The RHS has argued that this figure of two be reduced for particular categories of staff including ECRs and those returning from maternity/parental leave or long term sick leave. We supported Stern’s suggestion of a maximum, so that the outputs from one individual could not total more than six and a minimum of zero, in order to give departments maximum flexibility.

Some of the issues raised by the consultation exercise are technical; others may seem obvious. But if those at the academic coalface are to have their voices heard, it is vital that learned societies and professional associations take every opportunity to influence policy and put their views across.

Our submission, and our reports on gender equality for historians in UK higher education, and Impact Case Studies and Research Environments for REF2014, are available on our website (http://royalhistsoc.org/news-policy) for all historians and departments to use in making their own voices heard, within their institutions and beyond.

Mary Vincent