

Heads and Professors of Sociology

Annual Conference

7th-8th December 2017

Some Notes from Meeting

This was the second Annual Conference of HaPS to be held in recent years and we had representatives from about 20 Departments over the two days. The notes below summarise aspects of the discussion over the two days and list some take-away points that we shall be working on over the coming period.

REF 2021 and Sociology

Much of the discussion over the two days was focused on the preparations for REF 2021. On the first day of the conference the Chairs of the Sub-Panels were announced. It was fortunate that the Chair of the Sociology Sub-Panel, Professor Sylvia Walby, was in attendance representing Lancaster. This gave participants an early opportunity to exchange ideas.

The discussion on REF 2021 focused on the following key issues:

- The issue of the number of submissions to the Sociology Sub-Panel; which declined from 53 in 2001, 39 in 2008 to 29 in 2014. We explored the issue of how to encourage more submissions, the reasons why a number of units have chosen to submit to the Social Policy and Social Work Panel, and the impact of the falling submissions on the image of the discipline.
- The composition of the Sociology Sub-Panel for REF 2021. We discussed the need to have a panel that covers the wide range of sub-fields, different types of Departments, and that is reflective of the diverse composition of the discipline.
- The participation of sociologists in other Sub-Panels. It was noted that sociologists were likely to be involved in the work of a number of sub-panels.

Take-Away Points:

- We agreed to work to ensure that HaPS works with BSA and the Chair of the Sub-Panel to ensure that the Sub-Panel represents the diversity of the discipline
- We agreed to hold a meeting of HaPS to discuss the draft Guidance on Submissions sent out for consultation by the Sociology Sub-Panel.

TEF and Sociology

On the second day of the conference we spent some of the time discussing the impact of TEF on sociology as a discipline. In particular we discussed the following issues:

- The issue of how key metrics such as DELHE data, NSS will impact on Sociology as a discipline when discipline level TEF assessments are introduced in the coming period. We discussed the role that TEF was playing in a wide range of specific university environments and how Sociology was responding to TEF.
- We also discussed the need for the discipline to explore how we can work to respond to the wider discussions about issues such as DELHE, NSS in order to put us in a strong position to respond to the discipline level TEF assessments.
- Examples of initiatives within particular departments to deal with issues such as employability, work experience and research skills were discussed.

Take Away Points:

- HaPS to work with BSA to respond to the forthcoming discipline level TEF and share examples of good practice across the discipline.
- HaPS to work towards providing a repository of examples of good practice on such issues as employability, work experience.

Reports from Departments

The final part of the conference focused on hearing news from the Departments present. This provided an opportunity to hear about developments within Departments in relation to such issues as recruitment to UG and PGT programmes, staff recruitment, the diverse positioning of Departments within their specific university environments and the impact of debates about REF and TEF. We also received some reports from Departments that were not able to send a representative to the conference.

Take Away Points:

- It was agreed that it would be useful for HaPS to provide a forum for the sharing of good practice across the discipline. We will explore how best to maintain a repository that will share examples of good practice.
- It was also agreed that HaPS could play a role in helping to bring Heads of Department together to address challenges that the discipline faces or will face in the future.

Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be at the BSA Conference in Newcastle (10-12 April 2018). I look forward to catching up with a number of you there.

John Solomos
Chair of HaPS