

Interactive agenda Setting

24th and 25th February 2005
Cosener's House, Abingdon

Research Centres & Interactive Agenda Setting:

How do non-academic considerations influence the formulation and revision of research priorities? The purpose of this workshop (the second in a series of six) is to look in detail at how research groups and centres (some ESRC funded, some not) define themselves and how they construct and maintain their research agendas. We focus, in particular, on the ways in which research centres handle disciplinary and institutional priorities and how they respond to non-academic interests and concerns.

Most research centres and groups claim to have distinctive goals and ambitions. Most also claim to pursue cutting-edge programmes of work that exploit specific concentrations of competence. What do these features mean for the capacity to embrace or respond to non-academic priorities and the emergence of new 'hot' topics?

The workshop includes representatives from research centres and groups whose work is more and less obviously policy relevant. We have also invited people from relatively new centres and from those that are already very well established. By drawing upon these various experiences we hope to identify and compare methods of managing the potentially competing demands of relevance, coherence, growth and identity. In addition, we hope to learn about the iterative processes through which research agendas evolve. For example, how do the results of academic research influence non-academic priorities? What forms of feedback are involved?

The programme is divided into four sessions. Each includes a review of the agenda-setting and agenda-refreshing histories of two research centres or groups, and a more general presentation/discussion of some of the issues outlined in the background document prepared for this workshop. This is an informal event and we expect ideas and themes to spill over between one session and another.

Programme

Thursday 24th February

12.00 – 13.30 Arrive, Lunch.

13.30 – 13.45 Introductions.

13.45 – 15.45 **Session 1:** Histories and futures - and non-academic agendas

Ken Peattie: Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society (BRASS)

Johanna Moore: Human Communication Research Centre

Discussion of Greg Myers (1993) 'Centering: proposals for an interdisciplinary research centre', *Science, Technology and Human Values*, 18 (4): 433-459, and of HCRC annual reports of the last decade.

The two centres considered in this session are both ESRC funded. The Human Communication Research Centre, established in 1989, has a long and well documented history. BRASS, established in 2001, is much younger.

In both cases we want to consider how non-academic interests have shaped the sorts of substantive issues on which these centres concentrate, and on how styles and methods of non-academic engagement have changed over the years. In addition, we are interested in thinking about how past preoccupations influence future research directions and about how 'internal' and 'external' agendas interact.

15.45 – 16.00 Tea/Coffee break

16.00 – 18.00 **Session 2:** Development and renewal - and non-academic agendas

Mark Harvey: Centre for Research in Innovation and Competition (CRIC), Manchester

Sujatha Raman: Institute for the Study of Biorisks and Society, Nottingham

Discussion of configuring research collectives, based on Philippe Laredo's work - summarised in the discussion paper.

CRIC, an ESRC centre, was established in 1997 and has just recently set out a research agenda for the next five years. Nottingham's Institute for the Study of Biorisks and Society has a major grant from the Leverhulme Trust. This session provides an opportunity to reflect on the process of constructing a research agenda that builds on, but that also takes forward existing expertise, and that is sensitive to non-academic interests not only

now but also in the future. Nottingham faced the somewhat different challenge of establishing an interdisciplinary centre around a specific set of academic and non-academic priorities.

19.30 Evening meal

Friday 19th November

From 7.30 Breakfast

09.00 – 11.00 **Session 3:** Stable and flexible identities - and non-academic agendas

Tariq Modood: Centre for Ethnicity and Citizenship and Leverhulme programme on Migration and Citizenship, Bristol.

Bill Dutton: Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford.

Annemiek Nelis: Centre for Society and Genomics, Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

This session allows us to review the experience of three centres each of which inhabits a significantly different institutional environment. How do centres build reputations and identities in these various settings? What difference does the substance of the centre's work make to non-academic expectations of what the centre can and should be doing? How do directors 'direct' pathways and trajectories of present and future enquiry and how, and how far, do they respond to 'events' in the wider world? What are these centres for?

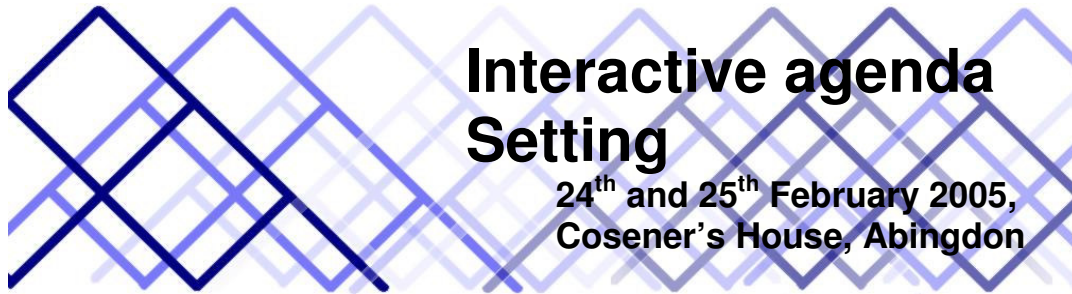
11.00 – 11.30 Coffee

11.30 – 13.00 **Session 4:** Centres - policies, directions and diversions

Adrian Alsop - ESRC

Following a presentation by Adrian Alsop, we want to use this final session to think about what is distinctive and special about interactive agenda setting for 'centres' - as compared to projects, disciplines, programmes or individual research careers.

13.00 Close. Lunch.



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