



Interactive agenda Setting

21st & 22nd July, 2005

Cosener's House, Abingdon

Public Sector Agendas - programmes

This workshop is about how agendas and priorities are set for publicly funded research programmes. What are the criteria involved (for instance, of relevance, value, public good, topicality, capacity building, etc.) and how these are operationalised in practice? How do research funders interpret non-academic priorities and how do researchers respond?

The intention is to compare the strategies and experiences of government departments, research councils and those who support international research activity and to do so by focusing on a selection of recent examples.

Going beyond the mechanics of research management, the aim is to show when and how academic and non-academic considerations interact in determining why one path is taken and not another. Such issues arise and are dealt with in different ways by government departments and research councils. One further aim is to see how institutional contexts influence the formation of priorities and the framing of research agendas.

Workshop participants will be invited to talk for 15-20 minutes, drawing upon their own experience of research programming, but focusing in particular, on the themes sketched below.

Programme

Thursday 21st July

12.00 – 13.30 Arrive, Lunch.

13.30 – 13.45 Introductions.

13.45 – 15.15 **Session 1: Programming - past, present and future**

Research council programmes are curious entities. The official agenda, in the form of a call for proposals, is 'set' through processes of specification, deliberation and consultation yet the individual projects that make up the programme inevitably reflect other priorities. Programme directors seek to make the resulting patchwork of projects add up to more than the sum of the parts, and in doing so, set, or at least influence future research agendas.

Contributors to this first session will be invited to reflect on the temporal 'career' of research programme agendas: how agendas are initially set, how they are re-defined within and by the projects of which programmes are made, and how they are retrospectively set again through processes of packaging and representation. Finally, we will also think about whether, when and how programmes transform the research landscape of which they are a part.

Jim Skea: UK Energy Research Centre and previously director of the ESRC Global Environmental Change programme.
Steve Rayner: Director of the ESRC Science in Society programme and the James Martin Institute, Oxford.

15.15 – 15.30 Tea/Coffee break

15.30 – 17.00 **Session 2: Programmes, policies and priorities**

The second session examines the relation between specific policy-related problems and research. What kind of research is required to support policy and how are policy issues translated into research priorities? In thinking about this interface, we are interested in the two-way flow of ideas between research and policy. The contributors to this session have experience of policy-oriented research programming in the field of social policy and child protection, but from different perspectives.

Jenny Gray, Policy Adviser, DfES
Leslie Hicks, Social Work Research and Development Unit,
University of York.

17.00 - 18.00 **Session 3. Science policy, programming and agenda setting**

On the face of it, research programmes are quite strong instruments of control: they allow funders and policy makers to determine priorities and steer the course of scientific enquiry. On the other hand, programme-makers depend on the active contribution and collaboration of researchers whose commitments and interests may lie elsewhere. In the last session of the day, we review ways of conceptualising these tensions.

Barend van der Meulen, University of Twente, The Netherlands

19.00 Evening meal

Friday 22nd July

09.00 – 10.30 **Session 4: Interdisciplinary programming - creating new fields, extending existing interests**

Simply because they represent deliberate concentrations of funding and expertise, programmes have the potential to consolidate but also to extend and re-define existing research priorities. In this session we consider two cases in which research programming is at least partly concerned to push disciplinary boundaries and encourage the development of interdisciplinary enquiry, perhaps leading to the formation of new cross-disciplinary agendas and priorities.

If 'real world' policy problems are inherently interdisciplinary, how can research programming be used to foster (or force) appropriately interdisciplinary lines of research? That is one question. Another is whether and how the fact of an interdisciplinary research programme might change perceptions of an existing topic or engender new fields of enquiry.

Frank Trentmann, Director of The Cultures of Consumption programme, funded by the ESRC and the AHRB.

Sara Skodbo, Social Research and Evaluation Division and Department for Transport.

10.30 – 11.00 Coffee

11.00 – 13.00 **Session 5: Public sector research**

The final session provides an opportunity to consider the distinctive qualities of publicly funded research as these relate to research agenda setting and to issues of accountability, governance and responsibility. We will begin with a brief discussion of principal-agent theory, and use this as a point of reference for the discussion as a whole.

Contributors include:
Chris Caswill

Eric Sampson, Department for Transport
Alan Patterson, Department for Transport
Paula Orr, Environment Agency

13.00 Close

Further information on previous workshops and on the programme as a whole is available at:

<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/sociology/research/projects/iass/isshome.html>