

The British Academy in 2002

The British Academy for the Promotion of Historical, Philosophical and Philological Studies, to give it its historic name, is now recognised, more simply, as the national Academy for the humanities and the social sciences, seeking to represent the interests of scholarship both nationally and internationally. The number of Ordinary Fellows elected for outstanding scholarly distinction stands in July 2002 at just over 750. There is a flourishing programme of publications, academic meetings and lectures. Recently the Academy has taken on a 'public understanding' role, both to enhance links with learned societies, other academic institutions, the public and the media, and to foster public appreciation of the humanities and social sciences through a series of outreach activities. It has launched a directory of on-line research resources, as part of its strategy for development of web-based communication. It has developed a mechanism for undertaking policy studies, investigating and commenting on topics of national concern relating to the Academy's objects: a recent example is the wide-ranging and incisive *Review of Graduate Studies* whose principal recommendations have been presented to Government and the various funding agencies. It is currently engaged in a study which will seek to quantify and provide firm evidence of the contributions of the humanities and social sciences to 'the knowledge-driven economy'.

International links and collaboration remain at the heart of the Academy's work and interests. Through membership of appropriate international organisations, through relationships, formal and informal, with other academies, research organisations and other scholarly bodies, the Academy seeks to ensure that British scholarship is properly represented abroad and that the framework exists for international collaboration and exchange – networks, joint activities, projects and agreements. At the same time the Academy provides core support to the overseas British Institutes and sponsors a range of Societies undertaking work abroad.

Freed from its quasi-research council functions, the Academy can devote its resources to identifying and supporting individual excellence, responding to the needs of active and especially younger scholars, and safeguarding the disciplines which it exists to promote. The Research Fund

now stands at nearly £7 million, and schemes exist to support long-term collective research projects, research appointments at both junior and more senior levels, individual research programmes with small personal grants, and conference grants for academic events overseas and in the UK. To give an indication of the level of activity, last year the Academy made 1,100 individual awards for research and conference grants, appointed thirteen mid-career research readers and seven senior research fellows, and gave thirty postdoctoral fellows the opportunity to establish a permanent academic career, through three-year awards. In all some 125 scholars currently hold research appointments in universities in the UK under the Academy's auspices.