

# President's Notes

By Sir Tony Wrigley PBA



The *Review*, although only in its fourth issue, has already become a key element among the Academy's regular publications. It is much appreciated both by Fellows, since it is not easy to keep abreast of Academy activities from any other source, and by the wider world, since it has proved invaluable in conveying to others an insight into the scale and range of our work.

In an age in which research funding by research councils tends to be focused on relatively large-scale and institutionally based projects (and in this context the Arts and Humanities Research Board may be regarded as a research council), the Academy has a special responsibility to ensure that the smaller-scale research needs of individual scholars are not neglected. This can be done both directly, by making provision for research grants, and indirectly, by enabling individual scholars to carry out a substantial piece of research, either through giving them relief from their teaching and administrative responsibilities for a sufficient period of time or through giving their careers an initial postdoctoral boost. The Academy's two research grant schemes (for small sums up to £5,000 and somewhat larger sums of between £5,000 and £20,000) are intended to be helpful in relation to the first type of need, while the Research Readership and Senior Research Fellowship programmes were devised to facilitate research leave for hard-pressed academic staff, and Postdoctoral Fellowships to provide opportunities for recently postdoctoral scholars.

Writing in early December it is opportune to comment upon this aspect of the Academy's support for research. The report *British Academy Support for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences: Report of a Review 1999–2000* was published recently. This report, prepared under the aegis of the Grants Committee, whose chairman is Professor Roger Kain, provides a wealth of information about the operation of the small grants scheme, while the first round of 'larger' research grant applications got under way recently. Moreover, the annual round of decision-making about appointments to Research Readerships and Senior Research Fellowships, to be taken up in October 2001, has recently been completed. Decisions about Postdoctoral Fellowship awards are taken at a later point in the Academy year but this is nevertheless a good time to reflect on the operation of these various means of providing research support for the individual scholar.

## Postdoctoral Fellowships

The Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme enables 30 young men and women who have recently completed their doctorates to spend three years engaged primarily in research, though with the

opportunity to acquire some teaching experience and so further to enhance their prospects of future employment in academic posts. In recent years the scheme has attracted 330–360 applicants annually of whom about 120 are A-graded, so that there is an abundance of excellent candidates between whom a choice must be made. Since these were topics which figured in the report of the last Structures Review Committee, it may be of interest to consider the operation of this scheme and the other Academy schemes which support individual research in relation to gender balance and to the 'golden triangle' (Oxford–Cambridge–London) question. Aggregated over the last three years the total number of candidates whose applications were accepted was 1,009, of whom 447 or 44 per cent were female. The total of awards was 90, of which 45 or exactly 50 per cent were made to women. Of the successful applicants, 15 had studied for their doctorates in Oxford, 25 at Cambridge, 15 at London (here and subsequently London refers to the constituent colleges of the University of London), 29 at other British universities, and six at universities abroad. The comparable split for universities in which the awards were taken up was: Oxford, 17; Cambridge, 22; London, 22; and other British universities, 29.

## Research Readerships and Senior Research Fellowships

The Research Readership and Senior Research Fellowship (SRF) schemes are intended for scholars in the middle decades of their careers who will normally be aged between 35 and 55. Applicants are free to apply to either or both of the two schemes: many apply to both. The schemes differ only in that the Readerships are for a two-year term whereas the SRFs are for a one-year term. In the past three years there have been 65 awards of Readerships and SRFs (most SRFs are funded by generous donations from the Leverhulme Trust). For the two schemes combined there were a total of 472 applications over the three-year period 1998–2000 of which 239 were A-graded: of the 65 awards, 40 were to Readerships, 25 to SRFs (I have included among the SRFs three awards of the Thank-Offering to Britain Fellowship). Of the 472 applicants 151 were female and 321 male, and therefore 32 per cent of the applications were by women, who in turn secured 31 per cent of the awards. The totals of applications from Oxford, Cambridge, London, and elsewhere were (percentages in brackets) 32 (7), 29 (6), 64 (14) and 347 (73), and the comparable totals and percentages of awards were 12 (19), 7 (11), 10 (15), and 36 (55).

In this context it is natural also to ask what percentage of PDFs, Readerships, and SRFs were awarded to scholars in the humanities and what percentage to social scientists since both

schemes, in common with all research grants made by the Academy are equally available to scholars in any discipline in either broad subject area. The question is more readily asked than answered, however, because a substantial proportion of all research proposals do not fall clearly into either area. The committees of final award have been increasingly conscious of this fact in recent years. In spite of this difficulty, there is no doubt that a significantly larger proportion of awards is made to scholars in the humanities than to those in the social sciences. In the case of the PDF scheme, approximately 73 per cent of awards in the past three years were made to humanities scholars, while in the case of the Readership and SRF schemes the comparable figure is about 63 per cent. The annual cost of the PDF scheme is currently about £1,975,000, while the combined annual cost of the Readership and SRF schemes is about £700,000.

### Small Research Grants

The annual cost of the small grants scheme (for sums of less than £5,000) is about £1.2 million and, because the resources available to the Research Committee have increased recently, it is now able to make approximately 500 awards a year, where previously the number of awards was much smaller. It is entirely responsive in its mode of operation. Grants made under the scheme may be used for direct research costs, research assistance, travel and maintenance, and consumables. Over the three-year period 1997–98 to 1999–2000 a total of 1,044 awards was made of which 67 per cent were to male applicants and 33 per cent to female applicants. The number of awards to 'golden triangle' and other universities was as follows (percentages in brackets): Oxford 62 (6); Cambridge 43 (4); London 135 (13); other British universities 804 (77). The last total is not accurately titled. It is convenient to quote a non-'golden triangle' figure but in this instance the total includes both a small number of awards made to scholars in Colleges of Higher Education or museums and galleries (12), and a much larger number made to independent scholars (112). With the usual caveat about the difficulty of distinguishing between scholars in the humanities and social sciences, it would appear that about 75 per cent of the grants were made to humanities scholars.

### Larger Research Grants

The larger research grants scheme (for sums between £5,000 and £20,000) was instituted because of the accumulating evidence that scholars were experiencing increasing difficulty in securing funding from the ESRC and the AHRB for sums larger than those available under the small grants scheme but still too small to arouse the enthusiasm of a research council. The larger research grants scheme represents an attempt to alleviate this problem. The upper limit was set on the assumption that it is proper that any project which entails the employment of a full-time worker for a year or more should be funded by the ESRC or the AHRB, which in turn suggests a figure of this order of magnitude. To finance projects accepted in the current round of applications, for which the closing date was 30 October 2000, the Academy will have available a sum of £500,000 but it is hoped that additional funding will in due course become available to enable the scheme to be conducted on a larger scale. It was agreed from the outset that the budget for small research grants should remain unaffected by any decision about the funding of larger research grants. Larger research grants are available principally for three purposes: to enable pilot projects to be carried out, usually to improve the applicant's prospects of securing funding on a larger scale in due course from the ESRC or the AHRB; for field study related to programmes of field work; and to finance extensions to an existing research project, provided that the proposal is self-contained. It is too early in the life of this new scheme to be confident that its characteristics can be identified with confidence. However, it may be of interest to note that in the current round there were 105 applications for a total of £1.57 million. The breakdown of applications by university shows that 4 (4) were from Oxford, 4 (4) from Cambridge, 9 (9) from London, 87 (83) from other British universities and 1 (1) from a museum (percentages in brackets). Men submitted 73 applications; women 32. Once again it is difficult to make a confident division between applications falling under the head of the humanities and those within the social sciences, but it appears that the approximate totals were 63 (60) and 42 (40) respectively (percentages in brackets).

**Table 1.** Percentage distributions of awards made in the last three years 1998–2000

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Oxford</i>	<i>Cambridge</i>	<i>London</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>(Total no.)</i>
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	
Postdoctoral Fellowships	50	50	17	28	17	38	90
Senior Research Fellowships/ Research Readerships	69	31	19	11	15	55	65
Small Research Grants	67	33	6	4	13	77	1,044

Table 1 summarises some of the information set out above. It focuses on percentage distributions though the totals to which the percentages refer are also listed. The data contained in the table should be read in conjunction with the text above. Two points in particular should be borne in mind. First, the 'Other' category refers both to other British universities and, in some cases, to universities abroad or to non-university institutions such as museums, as is made clear in the text above. Second, the distribution of Postdoctoral Fellowship award holders refers to the university from which the award holder came rather than the university at which the award was taken up. Both distributions are described above.

### Information Technology

When the Academy was founded the typewriter was just beginning to challenge the pen as the prime method for written communication, and the telephone was in its infancy. In the middle decades of the twentieth century the technology of communication changed only somewhat deliberately, but towards its end the pace of change became frenetic. It would be interesting to be able to plot the rising graph of Fellows regularly using email over the past five years, while word processing packages have undermined the traditional role of the secretary. Again, no institution can afford to be without a web site and the range of information obtainable directly and indirectly from web sites continues to grow exponentially. The Academy's web site was launched in 1995. It is now very greatly expanded and with the appointment of a contents manager early in the new year its centrality not simply to many of the activities of the Fellowship

but, it is to be hoped, to the humanities and social sciences in the country at large should develop rapidly. Before long it will no doubt be idiosyncratic not to apply for research appointments and research grants in electronic form. In most respects such developments are to be welcomed: in any case they can scarcely be resisted as younger scholars increasingly find earlier methods of communication inefficient or uncongenial. Not all is gain, nonetheless. The speed with which the bins set aside for paper recycling become filled, for example, seems only to increase in spite of the apparent likelihood that electronic means of communication should reduce paper use. And the ratio of dross to ore in material received has risen steeply as email has replaced the letter. Whatever happens in relation to developments such as these, however, I trust that neither concern about paper usage, nor the possibilities opened up by the web will prevent the continued and regular appearance of the *Review* in hard copy form.

### Secretary of the Academy

The year 2000 was notable not only to the world at large as marking the completion of a century and a millennium but to the Academy in particular as the year in which Peter Brown completed a quarter century of service to the Academy, for the bulk of the period as its Secretary. A party was held to mark the occasion. The combined efforts of many people served to ensure that it was a memorable event, memorable for the warmth of feeling which was so evident, and perhaps also as being, one might guess, the only event of significance to take place within the Academy's walls in the last quarter century of which Peter remained ignorant until the denouement!