

Review of SAS Special Funding – Panel Recommendations – November 2018

Introduction

1. This note sets out the Panel's advice to the Research England Council following its review of both the School of Advance Study's (SAS) original submission to the review of their special funding and the additional information provided on request.
2. Following the first panel meeting on 12 October 2018, the Panel were unable to reach conclusive recommendations on SAS's special funding on the evidence presented and so requested further information from SAS. The Panel met for a second time on 19 November 2018 to discuss this additional information against the review criteria and to provide recommendations on special funding to the Research England Council.

Panel Discussion

3. The Panel reviewed SAS's submissions against the following four criteria:
4. **Value for money.** The panel agreed that SAS provides **clear value for money** for Research England's investment in broad terms, particularly given the additional funding it is able to leverage from the University of London and other sources using special funding. The panel agreed that SAS's main value for money lies in its use of special funding (indeed, its use of income beyond this stream) to facilitate and promote research in the arts, humanities and social sciences nationally. The panel noted SAS's achievements across multiple areas as evidence of this value for money, several of which are detailed in paragraph 8 below.
5. Beyond this general assurance on value for money, however, the panel felt the information provided was insufficient to allow detailed comment on **exactly how combined Research England and external investment is spent and to what end.** More detailed information of this kind will be useful in future reviews and monitoring. The panel strongly recommend that SAS should make greater collective effort to generate additional income from, for example, grants, donors, training and events and to share best practice between institutes in achieving

this. The Panel are encouraging SAS to seek more additional income to ensure its longer term **sustainability** and reduced reliance on special funding from Research England over time.

6. **Public value and benefit.** The panel agreed that SAS collectively provides a **valuable national resource**. The panel noted that it is hard to measure the precise 'reach' of SAS simply on the basis of the geographical location of events it holds, and would encourage SAS to gather information to assess whether stakeholders and participants **beyond London** are satisfied with this provision. SAS should thereby be better able to evidence the impact of their national engagement activity. While noting that SAS's current strategy is in its infancy, the panel also agreed that ongoing work is needed in relation to strategy development to **strengthen how SAS provides a national role in shaping academic practice, supporting subject areas, advancing interdisciplinary innovation and providing leadership in research agenda**.
7. **Research facilitation.** The panel agreed that SAS provides a valuable national resource, facilitating research through the stewardship of unique collections, provision of specialist training for the next generation of researchers, promoting a number of emerging research fields and protecting some endangered ones. In particular, the panel agreed that SAS's second submission clearly outlined an overall strategy (albeit one in its early stages) within the School that focuses on research facilitation nationally. The panel were convinced that the previous Strategic Advisory Group within SAS had been useful in providing guidance and monitoring for SAS that had enhanced its ability to pursue research facilitation nationally. The panel also noted that SAS is beginning to engage with the need to promote **progressive change in some of the disciplines** it covers, but that not all institutes do this to the same extent or with the same degree of energy and purpose.
8. The panel noted multiple specific examples of SAS's excellence in facilitating research nationally. These included SAS's important and unique collections held across multiple institutes; its unique and distinctive elements such as the Warburg Institute; disciplinary expertise such as the Institute of English Studies' strengths in book history and palaeography; the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies' work bringing together academics and professional experts; the Institute of Historical Research's innovations in methodology and training; SASs' clear national reach and significance as evident in the IHR and the Institute of Classic Studies; emerging evidence of strong and productive collaborations

between institutes (including the Institute of Philosophy's summer school with the Warburg Institute); SAS's support for vulnerable disciplines as in the Institute of Latin American Studies and, to a lesser extent, the Institute of Modern Languages Research. The panel also commended SAS's use of strategic development funding to encourage new, cross-institute initiatives and interdisciplinary national events such as Being Human and national events such as English Shared Futures via the IES, co-organised with national bodies and subject associations, and would strongly encourage SAS to continue similar practices as best fit their funding mechanisms and strategy.

- 9. Comparison with other providers.** The panel are satisfied that there are **no direct comparators for SAS. The panel agreed that SAS's distinctiveness lies principally in its role as a national research facilitator rather than the original research produced by members of the various Institutes.** The panel noted that some elements of, and some institutes within, SAS are particularly distinctive, including the Warburg and its collections, and the IHR with its national role as a focus for seminars, projects, and training. The panel also noted the disciplinary niches filled by institutes such as the Institute of Latin American Studies, SAS's **convening power** in bringing together academics and professional experts in the Institute for Advanced Legal Studies and Institute for Commonwealth Studies as well as in festivals and gatherings such as Being Human and Shared Futures, mentioned above. SAS's distinctive training programmes in some institutes were also noted as distinctive by the panel.
10. Following the first panel meeting, the panel requested additional information from SAS to evidence the School's overall strategy for research facilitation nationally and for ensuring collaboration between the institutes, the distinctiveness and additionality enabled by special funding, further detailed evidence on how SAS is responding to changes in the disciplinary landscapes covered by its institutes, and data on finances, staffing and national reach. This second submission from SAS was discussed at the second panel meeting in light of the overall review criteria. Overall, the panel felt that the additional information satisfactorily addressed the questions they raised in the first panel meeting.
11. The panel concluded that SAS senior management has a strategic plan to spread best practice, promote **collaboration and sharing of limited resources, and direct the work of SAS collectively towards identifiable national needs. They noted that this strategy is in its early stages and needs to be implemented**

consistently and boldly. The panel were keen that further thought is given to how to **incentivise innovative collaborative practice in institutes** where there is currently less activity in these areas, though they were pleased to note that SAS strategy does seek to embed cross-institute working. As noted in paragraph 8, the panel also strongly approve of SAS's use of strategic development funding to pursue collaborative, interdisciplinary initiatives across its institutes.

12. The panel particularly appreciated the inclusion of equality and diversity information (EDI) in the second submission. They noted that it suggests a broadly healthy gender balance in SAS at all levels. Given its national role in shaping academic practice and supporting innovation, SAS has a responsibility to lead the way in promoting good practice in the adoption of **inclusive** curricular and research innovation. The panel strongly encourage SAS to show national leadership across institutes and as a whole in addressing diversity in relation to both learning and teaching and research priorities.

Recommendations

13. The Panel's advice to the Research England Council is as follows:
 - a. To continue to provide SAS with special funding at the current level on the understanding that this funding will be reviewed again in five years. SAS are encouraged to use the special funding **efficiently and ambitiously** to facilitate the research effort in the humanities and social sciences nationally.
 - b. Research England special funding should be used **only for the facilitation of research nationally** and not for original research production. SAS should be strongly encouraged to seek additional funding alongside the Research England special funding to grow and enhance their activities, thus reducing reliance on the special funding over time.
 - c. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) as currently configured does not provide an appropriate mechanism for assessing or funding SAS. There are numerous practical difficulties that would make submission of the various institutes or SAS as a whole to REF impractical and counter-productive. But the major barrier to using the REF to allocate funding is that the REF is not designed to measure

SAS's principle activity for which it receives Research England special funding: the facilitation of research in the UK and beyond.

- d. The SAS Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) should be reinstated to provide oversight and direction for SAS and to enable Research England to monitor SAS's use of special funding. This body, made up of senior figures recruited nationally, should receive annual reports from the SAS management group on the development and implementation of strategy, with a raft of relevant management information. Like the previous SAG, it would have sanctions at its disposal to withhold a portion of RE investment if it deems SAS to be failing in the scope or pace of its strategic development. The SAG should in turn provide information annually to Research England to allow monitoring of funding. Research England will provide SAS with clear direction on the types of information that should be provided to the SAG, though the SAG may also request additional information from SAS where necessary. The SAG should at a minimum expect to gather and relay information on SAS's progress against its strategies, how cross-institute working is being implemented, evidence for SAS' national reach, financial and EDI data, and the University of London's relationship with SAS. Research England expect to have membership as an observer on the reinstated SAG. Research England should also continue to subject SAS to regular reviews.
- a. SAS should be strongly encouraged to continue to **enhance their role as a research facilitator with national reach by undertaking cross-institute, cross-disciplinary, collaborative work** through the mechanisms they see as appropriate to this and by using the newly reinstated SAG to provide strategic oversight and accountability for such activity. The School should also engage more consistently and directly with the challenges of digitisation, developing a clear digital strategy for the collections and archives in their care.
- b. SAS are expected to continue upon the path they have outlined in their submissions by demonstrating leadership, national reach, ambition and boldness in their efforts to facilitate research and in their strategic activities to **make SAS greater than the sum of its parts.**