20 April 2023

Terms of reference

Steering Committee for AHRC Early Career Fellowships in Cultural and Heritage Institutions

Purpose

The Committee's main functions are:

- Steering the coordination and delivery of the AHRC programme – 'Early Career Fellowships in Cultural and Heritage Institutions'.
- Reviewing the process around the development and commissioning of the Expression of Interest (EOI) proposals.
- Reviewing the fair and transparent assessment of Fellowship proposals.
- Supporting and reviewing the development and delivery of the fellows' Cohort Development Programme.
- Supporting, reviewing and contributing to the evaluation and reporting of the Cohort Development Programme.
- Supporting and reviewing the scheme as a pilot scheme and evaluating new approaches to expanding and retaining diversity in the sector, to inform best practice in the sector beyond this pilot programme.

Constitution

This committee will commence in May 2023 for a period of 34 – 36 months.

Duties

The specific duties of the Committee are:

1. For the Cohort Coordination and Development Team, based at the V&A, to discuss the project milestones with steering committee members and to receive their guidance and support in addition to critical and constructive feedback.
2. To monitor the progress of the project in relation to the strategic objectives.
3. To review and advise on the project's coordination and strategy on an ongoing basis.

Authority

The Committee serves in an advisory role to the project coordinators. It will not normally have delegated powers.

Membership

Proposed membership will be sought from a broad range of communities representing the GLAM, Heritage, Creative, and Science sectors. This will include national and international representatives from non-IRO GLAM and Heritage Institutes, Higher Education Institutes and Cultural sector funders. There will be a representative from AHRC, and an ECR Fellow Representative will join the committee from October 2023.

Appointments
The Steering Committee Chair will be appointed by the Coordination Team in consultation with AHRC.

Meetings
Twice per year, or as required. The meeting agendas and minutes will be circulated to all members of the Committee for approval. The first meeting is intended to be held in hybrid format in London, to enable members to meet in person should they wish but allowing for remote attendance if preferred. Travel expenses to attend one in person meeting per year have been budgeted for. Future meetings may be at alternative locations or online, depending on the preferences of the steering group. Steering committee members will also have the opportunity to attend events organised during the Fellowship scheme.

APPENDIX

Project Coordination
The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) is acting as the cohort coordination and development team for the AHRC funded scheme. The scheme launched in November 2022. Fellowships will commence in late 2023 / early 2024, with full time fellowships lasting two years and part time fellowships lasting up to four years. The closing event will be held in the first few months of 2026.

Strategy, Objectives and Priorities for the Fellowship Cohort
Since 2006, the creation of Independent Research Organisations (IROs) has significantly increased research activity, capacity and public engagement in the cultural and heritage sector. Collaborative Doctoral Awards, offered through Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) and Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) schemes, have enabled cohorts of 'hybrid' researchers to undertake doctoral research in and with cultural and heritage organisations, while relationships with cultural and heritage organisations have also been developed at Undergraduate and Masters level, offering students experience in areas ranging from heritage management to curating, histories of art and science.

Research in and with IROs has been acknowledged to have wide benefits for researchers, IROs, academia and the public. The AHRC's 2017 report, *A Decade of Success*, highlighted the value of IRO-based research in 'bringing high quality arts and humanities research to a wider public' able to benefit from the 'sharper insights and better-tested knowledge' generated through research and shared in exhibitions, publications, programming and policies. However, despite these diverse benefits being acknowledged, they are not currently maximised due to a break in the pipeline of collaborative research opportunities after the end of doctoral studies. Although some organisations offer postdoctoral fellowships, others do not, creating a lack of consistency and coverage across the sector. For those postdoctoral fellows who do take up fellowships in IROs, there is little consistency to their experience and a lack of coordination in the support, training or professional development made available to them. In addition, lack of diversity in the sector is a major issue, as evidenced by recent reports such as the Royal Historical Society's *Race, Ethnicity and Equality* Report (2018) and the 2016 report *Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries.*

The V&A's overarching objective, as Coordination Hub for the IROC Fellowship Cohort, is to create a pilot programme for future research leaders in the cultural and heritage sector. Through this pilot programme, our overarching objective is to address current inconsistencies in provision for postdoctoral research opportunities in the cultural and heritage sector; train a cohort of future leaders with the knowledge, skills and experience to navigate and develop future career pathways in the sector; build capacity, expand and retain diversity in the sector, and support Fellows to produce public-facing, innovative research that speaks to strategic and societal priorities and that will have wide-ranging impacts.

Specifically, our objectives are:

1) Support the development and commissioning of Fellowship proposals, liaising between AHRC and the Independent Research Organisation Consortium (IROC) to identify cross-IRO priority themes; publicising the Fellowship opportunity, providing guidance and brokering partnerships between potential Fellows and IRO hosts, to ensure as wide-ranging and diverse pool of applications as possible and lay the foundations for new collaborations with IROs.

2) Support the fair and transparent assessment of Fellowship proposals, by developing a consistent Expression of Interest template; a consistent process for IROs to assess Expressions of Interest from potential Fellows; and for the final assessment of proposals submitted by Fellows and host organisations.

3) Design and deliver a cohort development programme for Fellows that speaks to individual and collective needs, provides a thorough grounding in key issues relevant to the cultural and heritage sector, equips Fellows with the tools, resources and confidence to succeed as researchers in the sector and become future cultural leaders.

4) Establish a robust governance, reporting and evaluation structure, including selecting and supporting a diverse Steering Committee that will meet twice a year throughout the programme; recruiting and liaising with an external Evaluation Consultant to build in evaluation of the programme from the outset; acting as the central point of contact and coordination with stakeholders, ensuring relationships are managed effectively and positively, including with AHRC, IROC, Fellows and the wider HEI and GLAM sectors. The programme will be evaluated with the aim of providing a template for future fellowships in the cultural and heritage sector.

5) Deliver a programme of innovative arts and humanities research, through Fellows' individual projects and potentially cross-cohort collaborations, that responds to GLAM organisations', AHRC's and sectoral priorities, generating new knowledge and practice that benefits organisations and delivers public impact.

6) Pilot and evaluate new approaches to expanding and retaining diversity in the sector, through work packages dedicated to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, a tailored programme of mentoring and by establishing partnerships and working with relevant organisations, to inform best practice in the sector beyond this pilot programme.

The cohort will extend beyond the duration of the project, enabling a cumulative transformation, building on the successful model of the AHRC/Institute for Government ‘Engaging with Government’ programme, which has created annual peer-group cohorts from a broad range of institutions navigating common challenges.

Through the evaluation of the programme, we will create a template for cultural sector fellowships and development that can be rolled out across the sector, ensuring the programme’s lasting impact. As Coordination Hub, we will also liaise between AHRC and IROC to ensure that Fellows’ research speaks to institutional and sectoral priorities, that innovative research produced by Fellows is shared widely with the public, and that the programme contributes to increasing diversity in the sector.