

# On university pressing and evidence pu(bli)shing: The view from a funder

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## Key points

- A total of 4% of REF2014 submissions were published by university presses.
- A total of 85% of all university press publications submitted for REF2014 were in the arts and humanities.
- A total of 97% of university press outputs funded by AHRC in REF2014 were in the UK and USA.
- Success can be found in the partnership between public investment and publisher support brokered by leading researchers.

## CONTEXT

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) is one of the seven UK Research Councils. It has an annual budget of ca. £100 m and has over 30% of all research-active staff in the UK – according to REF2014 – within its subject remit. Disciplines supported by the AHRC range from creative and performing arts to archaeology and linguistics, law, literature, languages, and heritage. Publishing is also one of the AHRC's research areas, and recent funding has been directed towards supporting a joint initiative with the British Library on the 'academic book of the future' (<https://academicbookfuture.org/>). For the last two years, in preparation for the UK Government Spending Review in 2015 and partly alongside its celebration of the tenth anniversary of its Royal Charter, the AHRC began to take a new look at the evidence sources and data available to support the arguments for investment in the arts and humanities as part of the wider science and research funding case. As part of that work, the AHRC was able to draw on its existing evidence sources – funding applications, grants awarded, narratives, and numeric information about the delivery and impact of AHRC research – which have previously been utilized in successive Impact Reports (AHRC, 2016). We also commissioned new pieces of research, such as the analysis by Deloitte on the economic, social, and cultural benefits of one AHRC scheme that has a specific emphasis on the 'follow-on' benefits arising from previous funding.

Building on the AHRC and other Research Councils' work in the development of Pathways to Impact as a core element in

considering the wider social, cultural, and economic benefits of research projects since 2007, one of the richest and most timely sources of information on the benefits arising from AHRC funding over a more extended period of time was the impact case studies submitted by arts and humanities researchers to the REF2014 (the Research Evaluation Framework). Serendipitously, the 2014/2015 academic year was also the first reporting year for AHRC-funded research through the researchfish© system, which collects outputs and outcomes from all Research Council-funded projects and which was combined with information previously collected by AHRC on research outputs and outcomes. Looking across these multiple and different sources of information, AHRC staff were struck by the kinds of information that researchers were drawing on for these different data submissions. We discovered details about outputs and impacts of AHRC funding that could be charted and documented in the REF impact case studies, which researchers had not included in relation to the same grants in terms of research output submissions to the AHRC via researchfish©. The AHRC's Impact Report for 2014/2015 (AHRC, 2016) was able to provide different kinds of approaches to the evidence available, partly drawing on the REF2014 submissions but more often using this as the basis for new conversations with the researchers themselves to update, expand, clarify, and enhance their information to our own corporate case. In several cases, this information related to the kinds of publications-related data captured and collected by publishers, including university presses.

This level of information has both surprised and delighted us, not least because it reflects the different contributions that

university presses can make within the funding continuum. During the last few years, the relationship between funders and publishers has resulted in some tension, specifically in relation to debates about open access to research and new mandates on the position of researchers, universities, and publishers in relation to the publication process. What we want to suggest in this very brief article are the ways in which publishers – and particularly university presses – can work with funders to give new consideration to the complementary roles these different bodies play in the enabling of UK's world-leading research environment. We see the different stages of our intervention in the research process – the funders as financial supporters and facilitators of the research activity itself, the publishers as not only the disseminators but post-research peer reviewers, quality arbiters, and communication leaders – as a source for ongoing engagement. Specifically in the case of the AHRC, we are also a funder of research into the publishing landscape and its evolving business models, which then feeds back into policy and practice. In the context of the evidence pushing we as funders have been undertaking and the university pressing and publishing work of the university press, we would like to see a new engagement in our collective endeavour to make the case for excellence in arts and humanities research, the resources required for this, and the impacts and benefits it achieves. At a time when both funders and university presses are thinking about their roles afresh, there is a place for thinking about the touch points, overlaps, and differences in what we know, what we do, and how we deliver in support of researchers. This will require all participants to engage in more active reflection on evidence sources and their nuances, particularly the issue of shared and divergent terminologies, greater understanding of (and harmonization of?) publication meta-data, and shared approaches to alternative metrics and evidence measures.

For the AHRC, we see this as part of a new consideration of our role as more than just a funder. We are an enabler, a broker, and a facilitator and increasingly desire to be recognised as a knowledge-based organization. This is in line with the recommendations arising from Sir Paul Nurse's Review of the Research Councils, where he commented on the 'higher level strategy' role of these organizations and various strands of 'Scientific Leadership' that included '[h]orizon scanning across the entire research endeavour' (see Nurse, 2015, Chapter 2).

However, we cannot do this alone. As university presses are finding new voices and roles, there are similarities in the challenge and the opportunities we face. Anthony Cond's comments are particularly pertinent here; while he appears to lament that 'presses do not, alas, exist in a vacuum on campus or off it' (Cond, 2015), it is precisely the university press as an academically analogous location within the world of research that holds a key strength at the present time, as Cond acknowledges in reference to the 'more institutional goodwill for such entities across the sector than at any time for a generation'.

University presses do have a distinctive role in the scholarly communication process. Although operating under varying mission statements and business models, the university press is more

often than not a department within the university structure and, in some cases, precedes the existence of current disciplinary structures within the wider institution by several centuries. The sense in which university presses take forward a mission that is grounded in a concept of the 'public good' of research dissemination – what the Cambridge University Press 1534 charter names the need to 'print all manner of books' – is aligned with the form of words in the AHRC's own Royal Charter to 'promote and support by any means' the full range of arts and humanities research, knowledge, understanding, and benefit. (AHRC, 2005)

## WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE EVIDENCE PU(BLI)SHING AND THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY PRESSES?

The first thing to note is that the information we are drawing on here comes with several caveats, including the relatively modest amount of data we have in hand and the time period we are considering. There are also caveats about the (in)consistent recording of publisher information by individual researchers when submitting to repositories. What we want to look at here is the data from REF2014 alongside information provided by AHRC's access to researchfish© submissions in November 2014 and March 2016.

Within the REF2014 submission, there were 7,149 outputs submitted (of a total of 191,150 submitted research outputs) that were published by a university press. Of the 7,149 university press outputs, a total of 6,084 were outputs in the arts and humanities. This means 85% of all university press publications submitted for assessment were in the subject areas covered by the arts and humanities domain. This is not unexpected given the prominence of monographs, editions, edited collections, and chapters from edited collections, which feature in arts and humanities disciplines, and the dominance of textbook university press publications in STEM disciplines, which would be less likely to be selected for REF outputs. The geographic range of those university presses submitted to the REF2014 is indicated in Table 1.

The dominance of the UK university press sector is clear and, combined with North America, represents over 97% of the total. The balance here may be less UK-centric as for data capture purposes, a UK university press with a USA office but head-quarters in the UK would be listed as UK-based.

The REF outputs are necessarily selective, and not all arts and humanities outputs are funded directly by the AHRC. If we compare the REF distribution in Table 1 with data on AHRC-funded publications from researchfish© in the same table, we see a broad consistency, with AHRC-funded publications being slightly more European and marginally less geographically diverse, with no outputs in African or South American university presses.

In terms of the type of AHRC-funded output published by university presses, the evidence supports the report by Geoff

**TABLE 1** Comparison of university press outputs in arts and humanities between REF2014 and AHRC funding.

Continent/ region	Number of REF Arts and Humanities university press outputs	Percentage of REF Arts and Humanities university press outputs	Number of AHRC-funded university press outputs in researchfish©	Percentage of AHRC- funded university press outputs in researchfish©
Africa	16	0.3	n/a	0
Asia	32	0.5	6	0.4
Australasia	7	0.1	3	0.2
Europe	4,490	79.7	1,271	82.8
UK only	4,732	77.8	1,231	80.2
North America	1,178	19.4	255	16.6
South America	1	0.02	n/a	0

AHRC, Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Crossick (HEFCE, 2015) that the book remains dominant in its long form, chapter form, and edited form (Table 2).

The journal article category is likely to be a significant under-reporting of university press-owned journals; we believe authors are more likely to associate a journal with the journal name than with its publisher compared to the publisher of a book, collection, and so on.

With respect to which university presses are involved in this process of dissemination, Table 3 contains information on the UK university presses that publish most AHRC-funded research based on the information within researchfish© sources.

The 'top' six university presses here are the same as the six highest from the REF, and Oxford and Cambridge university presses have the same positions. In terms of beyond the UK, those university presses recording six or more outputs that were AHRC-funded (all in the USA) are outlined in Table 4.

Given the increasing diversity of university presses and the rise of new university presses established over recent years, it is also worth considering whether there are any trends – likely to be modest – in the percentage share university presses have in relation to publication totals. This is where the information is most limited, however, in terms of trend identification. Based on the foundation date of a university press, the information tells us that publications recorded by AHRC-funded researchers in

researchfish©, which were published in the period 2012–2015, is as stated in Table 5.

The volume of publication totals here does not lead to many significant conclusions. That 2013 saw a significant increase in the total number of university press publications is no surprise given the REF2014 census date, and in that sense, 2013 might be taken as something of a 'blip' year. Comparison between dates excluding 2013 does not result in significant variations, with more recent university presses (post-1951) having a relatively static profile in terms of raw numbers, albeit with some accompanying uplift in percentage share due partly to decline in overall numbers of attributed publications; for example in 2015, pre-1900 has a share of 63% compared with 72.5% in 2012 with post-1951 presses or unknown date taking the majority of that difference, but we are still barely talking double figures.

What is worth considering – given that the established lead-in times for arts and humanities publications can be considerable – is whether the growth of new university presses, many of them established to engage with new open access issues or to embrace some innovative means of producing the 'academic book of the future', will lead to a change in these numbers over time. For this to be reflected in the AHRC's research, outcomes would represent one change in approach, but for these to become accepted in submissions to a future REF would indicate a broader cultural shift in the academic dissemination landscape.

## AN EXAMPLE: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS AND AHRC FUNDING

While the above information tells us about the broad role of university presses, both in the UK and internationally, in the dissemination of arts and humanities research and specifically that funded by the AHRC, it is just an overview. What we want to turn to now is a look – again at a high level – of a single

**TABLE 2** Publication type of university press-published AHRC-funded outputs.

Publication type as signified in researchfish©	Number of instances	Percentage of instances
Book/monograph	602	39.2
Book chapter	827	53.9
Book edited	59	3.8
Journal article	17	1.1
Other	30	1.95

AHRC, Arts and Humanities Research Council.

**TABLE 3** Volume of AHRC-funded outputs by UK university press reported over the period up to March 2016.

University press	Number of AHRC-funded university press outputs within the UK	Percentage of AHRC-funded university press outputs within the UK	Percentage of AHRC-funded university press outputs globally
All UK university presses	1,231		
Oxford UP	625	50.77	40.72
Cambridge UP	326	26.48	21.24
Edinburgh UP	90	7.31	5.86
Manchester UP	87	7.07	5.67
University of Wales P	44	3.57	2.87
Liverpool UP	38	3.09	2.48
Dundee UP (bought by Edinburgh UP in 2013)	9	0.73	0.59
University of Hertfordshire P	3	0.24	0.20
Aberdeen UP	3	0.16	0.13
University of Exeter P	2	0.16	0.13
University of Plymouth P	1	0.08	0.07
Nottingham UP	1	0.08	0.07
Imperial College Press	1	0.08	0.07

AHRC, Arts and Humanities Research Council.

university press example. Given the numbers cited above, the most logical and varied snapshot is from Oxford University Press (OUP). Examining in detail the role of AHRC funding in supporting the work of OUP publications illustrates several points. Taking just the information validated and provided during the 2014 researchfish© information submission relating to books and books (edited) only, we can observe the following:

- A total of 297 AHRC awards generated 508 OUP-published entries from 409 unique publications.
- These publications included 108 monographs and 104 edited collections, critical editions, dictionaries, and other resources.
- AHRC-funded research underpinned 72 chapters in 58 publications within the Oxford Handbook Series.
- Subject areas for the handbooks alone cover the full range of the AHRC's remit from *The Handbook of Ancient Anatolia* to *The Handbook of Danced Re-enactment* via *The Handbook of Crime Prevention*.
- The 108 OUP monographs, equally diverse in terms of subject spread, were written with support from AHRC funding to 106 awards, totalling ~ £16 million.

This information acts as a useful reminder of the two sides of the research process, represented by the funder and the publisher, each supporting the research community in a different way. In the case of the AHRC as funder, that £16 m of public funding is largely invested in one of the prime resources for arts and humanities researchers: time. Using funding to enable researchers to engage in focussed periods of sustained research

endeavour through both the research process and the writing up of that research is one of the key investments we make. When one couples this funding with the support from within the

**TABLE 4** Non-UK university presses with six or more AHRC-funded outputs recorded over the period up to March 2016.

University press	Number of AHRC-funded university press outputs	Percentage of AHRC-funded university press outputs globally
Yale UP	29	1.89
MIT Press	24	1.56
University of Nebraska P	14	0.91
University of Michigan P	12	0.78
Indiana UP	12	0.78
Duke UP	11	0.72
Columbia UP	11	0.72
University of Chicago P	11	0.72
Harvard UP	9	0.59
Bucknell UP	8	0.52
UP of Florida	7	0.46
Northwestern UP	6	0.39
Princeton UP	6	0.39

AHRC, Arts and Humanities Research Council.

**TABLE 5** Age of university presses reported in relation to AHRC publications.

UP foundation date/publication year	2012	2013	2014	2015	Totals
Pre-1900	158	238	116	102	614
1900–1950	45	85	60	50	240
1951–2000	13	6	7	7	33
2000–2007	1	2	2	0	5
Not known	1	4	1	3	9
Totals	218	335	186	162	901

AHRC, Arts and Humanities Research Council.

institution through the use of the REF allocations that generate Quality Related (QR) finances, then these OUP publications represent a significant investment of public intervention in the support of intellectual work. On the other side of things, the rigours of the publication and funding systems – peer review, assessment, revision, engagement with a whole range of professional actors in the funding and publishing process – enable this research to come to fruition.

To look specifically at the dual intervention by funder and publisher in acting as complementary, although different, supporters of the research process, we can take a single example from the OUP materials. *The Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* (<http://historicalthesaurus.arts.gla.ac.uk/>) was funded through its final stages by the AHRC supporting a project team of researchers led by Christian Kay at the University of Glasgow. This funding enabled Kay and his colleagues to bring the final stages of a 40-year research project to completion with the publication of an online electronic resource as well as a print version of the *Historical Thesaurus*. The extensive time period of the project – four decades – is distinctive in the arts and humanities but not unique, and many major editorial and corpus-based works have been engaged, at different times, with a range of funding sources. In the case of *The Historical Thesaurus*, the materials consist of the recorded vocabulary of English virtually in its entirety from ca. 700 AD to the present day. It contains over 797,000 words and 236,000 conceptual categories. Intellectually, the project has clear benefits in terms of language, culture, and heritage preservation. It has been award-winning in its response, being named Book of the Year in 2009 by *The Guardian* and the *Times Literary Supplement*, but it has also reached well beyond the academic. With impressive sales of more than £1.6 m in its print version for OUP since its publication, it has also generated new creative engagements and has been acknowledged as a resource by the Hugo Prize-winning novelist Mary Robinette Kowal, the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Geraldine Brooks, and the Carnegie and Whitbread Prize winner Philip Pullman. As a contribution to knowledge, an advancement in scholarship, a research resource, and a stimulus to further creative work, the project illuminates the complex interleaving between original research funding support and the web of benefits and impacts it continues to achieve (the original REF impact case study is here: <http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/CaseStudy.aspx?id=29361>). Although not explicitly acknowledged as such,

the project – like so many others – represents a partnership between public investment (AHRC) and publisher support (OUP) brokered by leading researchers (the project team). All three of these groups of actors have an interest in continuing to scope, map, and account for the further influence of the project outputs in their various forms, and each plays a role in the potential reuse of that evidence in the case for further financial support for this research area, the wider field, and the arts and humanities more broadly.

## CONCLUSION

As we outlined from the outset, this really is the beginning of a conversation. The materials we have looked at in this article, including the brief case study of OUP, indicate only the initial parameters of the discussion, but the information is currently limited in terms of information entered into the system and the time period over which we could consider trends or significant features. A more detailed look at the materials at the disciplinary range level, topics of research publications and the relation to research funding decisions, might – subject to recognition of the time lags between research work and its output delivery – indicate new ways in which such sources of information could be brought together. The AHRC has begun work related to this in considering the role of publisher information – ranging from publication details in the sphere of academic books through to journal keywords – in the context of a variety of other sources (REF environment statements; strategy documents from subject associations and learned societies) to see whether this might aid the development of the 'horizon questions' programme outlined in *The Human World: The Arts and Humanities in Our Times – Strategy, 2013–2018* (AHRC 2013), but this is very much early days. What is clear is that in academic publishing, and university pressing perhaps in particular, we have a mutually useful resource for considering the ways in which a funder like the AHRC can make the case for ongoing, increased investment in the research fields and researchers it, and the publisher, support.

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