

## **Anthropology Subject Area Overview Report**

In the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise, the Anthropology Subject Area Panel (#37) received 20 submissions, which was similar to the number it received in the 1996 RAE. The number of research active staff (A+A\*) submitted in 2001 represented about a 9% increase compared to 1996. Institutional decisions to submit to the Anthropology Panel in 2001 appear to have been influenced to some extent by the existence, for the first time, of a Development Studies Sub-Panel, hosted by the Geography Panel. However, there was still a healthy component of applied anthropological work evaluated by the Anthropology Panel in the 2001 RAE, and a member of the Anthropology Panel also served on the Development Studies Sub-Panel. Development studies apart, the Anthropology Panel received a wide range of research outputs for evaluation, including substantial components of biological anthropology, material culture and museum studies, in addition to social anthropology.

In general, the Anthropology Panel was impressed by the high standard of the research that it evaluated, as evidenced by the high average of the grades awarded. 83% of the research active staff (A+A\*) submitted in 2001 are members of units of assessment graded 5 or higher. The Anthropology Panel's favourable evaluation of the discipline in the UK was strongly corroborated by the independent opinions of the panel's group of international experts.

The age profile of the research active staff submitted to the Anthropology Panel in 2001 reflects a relatively healthy situation, although a more substantial recruitment of staff in the younger age cohorts would be desirable. About 7% of the A+A\* staff submitted are scheduled for retirement over the next five years, with another 14% being due to retire by 2011. At the younger end of the age profile, 4% are under the age of 30 and 10% fall in the 30 to 35 age bracket. While the use of short-term contracts has declined somewhat since 1996, the panel noted that a significant proportion of these younger staff are still employed in short-term or post-doctoral posts, despite already establishing themselves as productive researchers. The Anthropology Panel considers this situation, in which younger staff must wait until their mid-30s to obtain permanent posts, unsatisfactory. Data on the gender distribution of research active staff were not available to the panel for analysis.

Research student numbers in anthropology have continued to increase since the 1996 RAE, although recent analysis suggests that this increase has largely been in the overseas student category. The discipline of anthropology must confront this challenge of maintaining the number and quality of UK-domiciled postgraduates to replenish its academic staffing base.

Research in biological anthropology is carried out in 7 of the 20 institutions which submitted to the Anthropology Panel. It emerged as a small but strong element within anthropology, and there was evidence of growth both in terms of new

institutions and within existing units since 1996. Most research was purely biological, but there was also evidence of interesting collaborations with social anthropology. Much of the submitted work was of a high standard, although there was little by way of major synthesis as opposed to basic results. It was clear that the major research groups in biological anthropology are developing strong links with the biological sciences as well as social anthropology.

The panel and international experts were able to reach a high degree of consensus in their identification of outstanding work in the discipline. But it was noted in relation to social anthropology that the disciplinary experts' assessment of research priorities overlapped only in part with the ESRC's identification of thematic priorities in research. This mismatch is likely to have resulted from anthropology's minority status among ESRC-funded disciplines. However, in the interests of "joined up" thinking, the panel would suggest that the ESRC re-evaluate its own funding priorities in the light of the basic research demanded for the coherent disciplinary development of anthropology.

With regard to regional specialisms, the research outputs submitted to the 2001 RAE confirmed an increasing focus on Europe, with work on Eastern Europe in particular experiencing growth. This trend favouring European research, which had already been identified more than a decade ago, is likely to be associated with the relative availability of research funding, and the panel expressed concern regarding the decline in funding for research undertaken outside Europe. As for work on non-European societies, the panel noted areas of decline, especially Africa and parts of Asia, as well as areas of expansion, such as Northern Asia.

While the research outputs submitted to the 2001 RAE contained some outstanding ethnographic monographs, the relative decline of this form of publication was regretted by the Anthropology Panel. In the panel's view, this situation may well reflect the pressure of successive RAEs, as well as the changing preferences of academic publishers. On the other hand, the panel noted a distinct increase in the publication of edited collections of articles, which is one of the more important media for the discipline's active production of theoretical and comparative work in social anthropology. Articles by UK anthropologists continue to figure prominently in all leading international as well as national journals in the field. In general terms, the Anthropology Panel felt that in light of the high standard of research being achieved in UK departments, the discipline should be more confident in putting itself forward as a distinct intellectual project and in communicating this project across disciplinary boundaries, to students, and to the wider public.