

# Arts and Humanities Research Council

## funding for film

Produced for the UK Film Council  
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## 1. Executive Summary

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) is one of the UK's seven Research Councils which between them invest around £2.8 billion per annum in research as part of the Government's dual support system. Of this, the AHRC receives around £112 million for investment in 'research that furthers our understanding of human culture and creativity'.

Broadly, the AHRC's funding schemes comprise funding for individual scholarship (typically masters, doctoral and post doctoral research) and research grants aimed at researchers wishing to bring benefits to other individuals and organisations through the conduct of research. Standard Research Grants, which comprise the vast majority of grants made, can be for up to £1 million for projects lasting up to 60 months. In addition to research and individual grants, the AHRC invests around £3 million per annum in Knowledge Transfer projects and smaller sums on 'Funding Initiatives' which are under regular review and are aimed at addressing 'issues of intellectual and wider cultural, social or economic urgency.'

The AHRC operates through a wide range of partnerships comprising principally Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) but also the private sector, the public sector and formally recognised independent Research Organisations (IROs). It has formalised Knowledge Transfer Partnerships with the BBC and BT as well as working with Arts Council England (ACE) and the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA). To date, the UK's film infrastructure support organisations have had limited engagement with the Council

Since the beginning of 2007, the AHRC has invested around £5 million in film-related research activity through a wide range of academic institutions. This comprises 57 research grants and 58 individual grants for post graduate study. The themes addressed are very wide-ranging and include national cinema, genre, the work of particular directors or actors as well as broader issues such as the impact of digital technologies. They have also funded cataloguing archive material, digitisation of film materials and non-feature productions including animation, experimental and documentary.

There are several possible points of engagement for the UK Film Council and its partners. These include Knowledge Transfer Fellowships, engagement at policy and strategic level (like the BBC partnership), the cross-Council Digital Economy Programme, Research Grants or the creation of networks and workshops. This is probably a good time to make an approach following major restructuring and relocation which has now concluded.

However, potential drawbacks to engagement are the extremely long lead times for decision-making (around 30 weeks for a Research Grant) as well as an

apparent focus away from empirical study. The AHRC in line with the rest of the Higher Education sector is likely to face severe financial constraints over the coming years. On the plus side, the Council is very keen to develop strategic collaborations and to take on work where impact is readily demonstrable and results can be disseminated to audiences beyond academia.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1 Research funding context in the UK**

The UK Government funds research through a dual support system. This involves a core grant, which includes both teaching and research support from the four national Funding Councils, and project grants from the seven UK-wide Research Councils. The Funding Councils provide Quality-Related (QR) Funds for research, allocated by formula to individual universities and higher education colleges, and based on the results of the recurring Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) – now replaced by the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

Research Council funding, in contrast to university core grants, can provide guided strategic support that more directly takes account of wider policy requirements, and can react to cross-institutional and UK-wide issues.

Apart from the dual support system, there are other sources of UK research funding for the arts and humanities. This includes the British Academy (around £20 million per annum) and charitable trusts such as Leverhulme and Wellcome whose joint resources total £540 million.

### **2.2 Research Councils Funding Context**

There are seven Research Councils in the UK. Each year they invest around £2.8 billion in research covering the full spectrum of academic disciplines from the medical and biological sciences to astronomy, physics, chemistry and engineering, social sciences, economics, environmental sciences and the arts and humanities. They are: the Arts & Humanities Research Council; the Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council; the Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council; the Economic & Social Research Council; the Medical Research Council; the Natural Environment Research Council and; the Science and Technology Facilities Council (focusing primarily on physics, astronomy and particle science).

### **2.3 AHRC Background**

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), a Non-Departmental Public Body sponsored by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, provides public funding for research, postgraduate training and knowledge transfer in the arts and humanities. It was established in 2005 and is the successor body to the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB), which was formed in 1998. In 2010/11 they received £112 million for research activity. In any one year, the AHRC makes approximately 700 research awards and around 1,500 postgraduate awards. For the year 2008/09, approximately £63.5 million was allocated to research grants including around £3 million to knowledge transfer

projects, over £41 million to postgraduate awards and £10 million to museums and galleries.<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1 and latest research priorities for further detail and appendix 15 for an organisation chart.

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<sup>1</sup> These figures are taken from the annual report and accounts 2008/09, although they do not coincide with figures given on the website or statistical reports

### **3. Funding Schemes and strands**

The AHRC's funding falls broadly into four categories (see appendix 2 for a full list of schemes).

#### **Post-graduate funding including post doctoral research grants**

These schemes are for individual scholarship and the topics addressed are student-led and account for around 36% of available resources with the average award size in the region of £27,000. Some of these are awarded for film studies and related areas - the figure was 3% of eligible applications in 2008/09.

#### **Research grants**

None of these is for individual scholarship but are aimed at researchers wishing to bring benefits to other individuals and organisations through the conduct of research. These are divided into three categories – Standard, Early Career Route and Speculative. Standard Research Grants are for project costs totaling £20,000 - £1 million lasting up to 60 months and most Research Grants fall into this category. Speculative Research Grants are for riskier projects with a maximum value of £200,000.

#### **Knowledge transfer (KT)**

KT grants are for projects designed to address strategic issues in business or other non-academic organisations. There are three schemes – KT Partnerships, the Knowledge Catalyst Scheme and the KT Fellowship Scheme. These tend to be for projects of shorter duration than research grants. Partnership funding is required except for the Fellowship Scheme which involves the placement of a researcher in an organisation.

#### **Funding initiatives**

These are essentially strategic funds aimed at addressing issues of intellectual and wider cultural, social or economic urgency that the Council considers are best supported by concentrated and coherent funding initiatives. See appendix 3 for a list. Most of these are closed with only one planned new one (according to the website) which is called *connected communities* which does have some potential application to film.

(see appendix 4 for detail on individual schemes)

There is also a range of international research initiatives covering Europe, the US, Japan, China, Taiwan and Korea.

Thus, the spectrum covered is extremely wide and encompasses individual scholarship at the first level, through to major long-term strategic research programmes which address key social, economic and technological issues of the day. The subject areas covered are very broad too (see appendix 5) and the Council takes a liberal attitude to its interpretations. For example, it has funded

Patrick Keiller's film *Robinson in Ruins* through its Landscape and Environment Programme.

#### 4. AHRC Funding of film 2007 to present

This data has been collated from the AHRC database against a range of subject headings, cross-checked for duplication (entries are sometimes listed under more than one subject heading) and projects that are not relevant (mainly those relating to television) excluded.

The projects included in the analysis below from the database are listed in the tables in appendix 6.

##### 4.1 Level of investment

In summary, over the period under study from the beginning of 2007 to date, the Council made 57 research grant and other awards totaling £4,155,165 relating to film. Assuming this averages out to over £1 million per year, this represents about 2% of all Research Grants. In addition during the same period it made 58 awards of unspecified amounts for post graduate and doctoral research. As the average award size is £27,000 this would represent around £1.5m for the period.

##### AHRC awards for film-related research January 2007 – September 2010

Subject	2010		2009	
	No	Value £	No	Value £
Media Film History	3	1,114,492	5	305,319
Media & Comms	1	332,520	0	0
Visual Arts	1	25,948	5	164,981
Cultural Policy	0	0	0	0
Other	1	18,020	1	35,542
Grand Totals	6	1,490,980	11	505,842

Subject	2008		2007		Grand totals	
	No	Value £	No	Value £	No	Value £
Media Film History	4	110,519	11	627,716	23	2,158,046
Media & Comms	1	16,765	1	74,154	3	423,439
Visual Arts	7	148,143	5	460,700	18	799,772
Cultural Policy	1	89,489	0	0	1	89,489
Other	4	86,496	6	544,361	12	684,419
Grand Totals	17	451,412	23	1,706,931	57	4,155,165

## 4.2 Research Subject areas

There is a very wide range of research topics covered. These can be broadly categorised as follows:

**National cinema**, usually from a particular era and often in relation to its social impact eg *Comedy and Social Change in French Cinema Since 1990*; *Region, Humour and Heimat: New Rural Realities in Contemporary German Documentary Cinema*; *Balkan Cinema: Film and History*.

**The work of particular film Directors** eg 'How did you get inside my house?' *The architecture of David Lynch*; *Hypermediated Realism of Literary Film: On the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky and Stanley Kubrick*.

**Genre** eg *Reinterpreting the Past: The New Hollywood Historical Film, 1967-82*; *Manga Movies: Contemporary Japanese Cinema*; *Media Franchising and Transnational Adaptation*.

**History** eg *Eugen Shuftan and the Transnational Aesthetic - Émigré Cinematographers Through Europe*; *Documenting the History of the British Film Institute: An Online Resource*; *Actors and acting styles in British silent cinema*.

**Players** (Stars, Writers/Producers/ Production Companies)  
eg *HBO's Rebel Sell: Alternative Commercial Production from 1997 to 2007*; *Elizabeth Taylor: From Child to Adult Star*.

**The industry/support agencies** eg *Independent film and video distribution in the UK*, *The Contemporary Promotion of Artists' film and video in the UK*; *Creativity: policy and practice. A study of Government, the BBC and UK Film Council*; *The Negotiation of Innovation: Colour Films in Britain, 1900-55*.

**Productions** - these are usually short films - experimental, documentary and animation eg *Wavescape*; *The Stag without a Heart*; *Sitting Still*; a 16mm, 20 min, (col) film which brings the filmmaking process as performance and image into the fold of fragmented spoken narratives.

**Archive** – cataloguing, making it available eg *Anglia Television at the East Anglian Film Archive: A Catalogue of the Collection, 1959 to 2000*.

**Digital** - in particular immersive worlds, interactivity and digitisation  
eg *A Public Voice - Access, Digital Story and Interactive Narrative*; *Phoenix Rising: Online New Media Centre development*.

## 4.3 Awardees

(see appendix 7 for full list)

Awards are made to a very wide range of institutions, in particular those specialising in film and media although not all of the latter are represented by any means. HEIs receiving more than one award over the period under study were Bristol, East Anglia, Glasgow, Kings College London, Queen Mary London, Reading, Cambridge, Exeter, Queens Belfast, Sunderland, Warwick, University of the West of England.

## **5. Other Initiatives of Interest**

### **5.1 AHRC and BBC Knowledge Exchange Programme**

The aim of the partnership is to bring together the arts and humanities research community with BBC Future Media and Technology staff to enable co-funded knowledge exchange and collaborative research and development.

The benefits from the outcomes and outputs of these projects should be of equal significance to both partners.

The two organisations are investing around £580,000 on a total of eight projects on a 50/50 basis to explore for example the effect on children of online games and immersive worlds. Partner universities include the University of Westminster, Cardiff, Glamorgan, Manchester, Ulster, UWE, Bristol, Leeds, Central England and London Metropolitan. See appendix 8 for further details of the projects.

### **5.2 AHRC Centre for Research in Intellectual Property and Technology**

Established in 2002, this centre is the focus for policy debate as well as a major centre for training and development on IP. Their flagship project is a UK genetic databank as well as leading debate on biomedical ethics and use of personal data. However, its remit covers all areas of IP including the commercial end (see appendix 9).

### **5.3 The Research Councils UK Digital Economy Programme**

The Digital Economy Programme brings together the work of the EPSRC and that of the AHRC, ESRC and the MRC (see appendix 10). This Programme had a total budget as follows:

Research:

£46 million commitment for 2008/09

£18 million commitment for 2009/10

£19 million commitment for 2010/11

## **5.4 Other key AHRC partnerships**

### **The Technology Strategy Board**

Using its experience in developing innovative KT models, the AHRC has provided expert advice to the TSB in scoping and developing the first TSB Collaborative R&D Competition for the Creative Industries (CIs) 'Application of Digital Technologies' and the Knowledge Transfer Network (KTN) for the CIs.

The AHRC is represented on the TSB steering board. As the partnership develops, so the focus for the AHRC's collaboration with the TSB will diversify to increase the contribution of arts and humanities to innovation processes across a broader range of sectors.

### **British Telecom**

March 2009 saw the joint AHRC/British Telecom (BT) Pilot Research Networking call on the theme of 'Digital Heritage', part of a wider initiative to bring arts and humanities researchers together with BT staff and researchers to support collaborative research and development.

### **Museums, libraries, galleries and archives**

Through its establishing of Independent Research Organisation (IRO) status for a number of national organisations that enable them to apply for funding, the AHRC has become one of the main funding bodies to support research in this sector. An investment of some £3 million in 2008/9 has enabled museums, galleries, libraries and archives to better interpret and communicate their collections to a wider public and to allow them to act as key intermediaries between the UK research base and the wider public.

### **The Design Council**

Currently an informal relationship, with mutual policy concerns which are shared through joint working on creative industries committees.

## **6. Relationships with film and film-related organisations**

### **6.1 UK Film Council**

The UK Film Council currently has no formal relationship with the AHRC although it has collaborated on *Crossing Boundaries: The Role for Cross-Art-Form and Media Venues in the Age of 'Clicks' not 'Bricks'* under the AHRC's Knowledge Transfer Programme in 2007.

## **6.2 National and Regional Screen Agencies**

On the whole, the Regional and National Screen Agencies have not developed any direct partnerships with the AHRC although many have developed links to HEIs and in Wales there is a CPD training scheme for film production companies led by the Film Agency for Wales and funded by the HEFCW. The exception to this is Screen South West where the CEO is a member of AHRC's *Beyond Text* committee and founding member of SW Creativity Network (AHRC co-funder). The Watershed in Bristol has also partnered on a couple of research projects funded by the AHRC.

## **6.3 BFI**

The BFI has no direct relationship with the AHRC although there has been some indirect involvement. The current Head of Strategic Development was a co-investigator on an AHRC-funded project based at the Centre for Cultural Policy Research on the investigation of creativity in policy and practice. He was also co-investigator of an AHRC-funded history of the BFI.

Previously, the Mitchell and Kenyon restoration was part-funded by AHRC with an award via Sheffield University of around £146,000. Currently there is a project of Colonialist cinema led by Colin MaCabe at Birkbeck which uses BFI collections and will involve some digitisation.

## **6.4 ACE**

ACE has had a positive and productive relationship with the AHRC for the last six and seven years underpinned by a memorandum of understanding. The key areas where they work together are on top level policy, in particular shared evaluation and impact assessment, and collaborations between the academic sector and the cultural sector relating to knowledge transfer eg LCASE in London which tries to connect London Universities with cultural organisations. The biggest conversation to date is around the proposed digital innovation fund for the arts where they intend to pool resources.

## **6.5 NESTA**

NESTA works quite closely with AHRC eg it is a funding partner for NESTA's Creative Credits innovation vouchers programme (along with ESRC). Their Head of Research sits on some of their panels eg AHRC Impact Taskforce, the Steering Group for a possible new copyright and business models centre. AHRC is also involved in discussions with ACE about the new arts digital innovation fund.

## **6.6 Skillset**

Skillset currently has no relationship with the AHRC but they have been approached with a view to establishing a relationship with them and involving a number of the other Research Councils.

## **6.7 Others**

Neither First Light nor FILMCLUB have any relationship past or current. MeCCSA have no relationship other than previously having had conferences funded through them.

## **7. Eligibility, process and timeframes**

### **Eligibility**

AHRC only accept applications from those working within and supported by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) funded by the Higher Education Funding Councils as well as designated Independent Research Organisations (IROs). See appendix 11 for a full Research Council eligibility guidelines. In order to gain IRO status, organisations must have the in-house capacity to undertake research, be non profit-making and not part of the public sector. See appendix 12 for more detailed guidelines on eligibility for IRO status and a list of currently recognised IROs.

That said, the AHRC collaborates with a very wide range of organisations including Arts Council England, the BBC and NESTA which would not qualify as IROs but which do have research departments and a substantial interest in its area of work. These relationships tend to work around the joint pooling of resources.

### **Process**

A system of peer review is used for all applications. Peer Review works within four subject areas and each application must sit within one of these areas (see appendix 13 for panel subject areas), regardless of whether it will be viewed by a panel of assessors. Subjects and disciplines are continually evolving, and there are inevitable overlaps and boundaries that are shared with other award-making bodies especially with other Research Councils.

In 2008, the AHRC revised its decision-making structures to enhance the effectiveness of its peer review process. This new structure replaced a system of standing discipline-based panels with a broader Peer Review College, including increased non-academic and international representation, from which members are drawn for each individual round of panels. These 'prioritisation panels', functioning as moderators, make decisions based on evidence of quality provided by expert peer review. Thus expert peer review remains at the core of this process, and the new decision-making structure allows for a wider engagement from a broader range of stakeholders.

## **Timeframes**

It currently takes around 30 weeks to process a funding application. The setting up of strategic alliances has been equally time-consuming. In working with the BBC and BT there were a series of seminars to first establish what the potential areas of common interest might be. Following this, schemes were set up and a bidding process took place. Thus, the strategic alliance route of approach is likely to be more time-consuming than a simple grant application. For example, although they started working with the BBC in 2005, the scheme was only launched in 2007.

## **8. Audiences/end users**

The AHRC does not particularly concern itself with targeting particular audiences or end users of its funded research as part of its strategic plans, mainly because most of its programmes are responsive. However, it does have two prime concerns relating to this:

### **Impact assessment**

The AHRC is very committed to demonstrating the impact its research has in the wider world and this is particularly important in relation to making the case to Government for continuing support. The focus is on both social and economic impact. For example a practice-led research project leading to an exhibition about a mining community in County Durham had impacts including financial (a museum increased its visitor numbers) as well as social, with local residents able to reflect on and take pride in their heritage.

### **Dissemination**

The AHRC has become increasingly keen to see research findings disseminated beyond the confines of academia to the wider world, in particular to industry and commerce. For example, Grippa, an anti-theft bag clip for use in bars and restaurants, was shown at the 'Safe – Design Takes on Risk' exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. This attracted interest from the Manhattan Robbery Squad and Starbucks, highlighting how relatively simple dissemination activities can lead towards making links with potential users and beneficiaries.

## **9. Opportunities and threats for AHRC**

### **Threats**

Cuts in funding from Central Government  
Perception of Arts and Humanities as 'soft' subjects  
'Internal' competition for resources from other better established Research Councils

### **Opportunities**

Strategic collaboration especially with the business sector (KT)

Centralisation of administration

## **10. Potential areas for collaboration**

### **UK Film Council Innovation Fund**

Either as an advisor or co-funder although they may be reluctant to duplicate what they are already doing with ACE/NESTA. DCMS is likely to want to see pooling of resources or at least 'joined up' thinking

### **Audience research for the digital age**

There could be a potential collaboration between the UK Film Council, an HEI and an industry partner to apply for a Research Grant. This might arguably be better placed under one of the ESRC schemes (see appendix 14 for areas of potential joint interest relevant to film) since they have a track record of funding audience research and the AHRC is less focused on empirical research (ie measurable, quantitative-based research) but things like new patterns of media consumption could fit into anthropology or ethnography.

### **Networks and workshops**

There is some low level funding available for the development of networks and delivery of training and learning through workshops.

### **High level policy/strategy work**

To develop a partnership similar to that with the BBC in order to investigate and identify issues of joint interest. This would very likely be a long-term proposition (two years plus).

### **Knowledge Transfer Fellowship**

Would involve working with an individual researcher. Two key advantages are that it's a rolling programme and would require no cash input from the UK Film Council.

### **Digital Economy**

This cross-Council scheme is led by EPRS and co-funded by the TSB. Audience research for the digital age may sit well within this scheme although the new programmes have yet to be announced.

### **AHRC Centre for Research in Intellectual Property and Technology**

Substantial resources have been dedicated to this centre and although its recent focus is on biomedical ethics and issues, in theory it covers the whole spectrum of IP concerns.

## Appendices

[Available on request]

1. AHRC background and research priorities
2. AHRC funding schemes and strands
3. Funding Initiatives schemes
4. Detail on funding schemes
5. AHRC subject coverage
6. Database extract tables
7. List of HEI awardees for film-related research grants from 2007 to present
8. AHRC/BBC Knowledge Exchange Programme projects
9. Detail on the AHRC Centre for Research in Intellectual Property and Technology
10. Research Councils UK Digital Economy Programme
11. Eligibility for Research Council funding guidelines
12. Eligibility guidelines for IRO status and list of current IROs
13. Assessment Panel subject areas
14. Areas of potential joint interest between Research Councils relevant to film and AHRC statement on Cultural Policy research
15. AHRC Structure 2008/09

## Glossary

ACE - Arts Council England  
AHRB - Arts and Humanities Research Board (predecessor body to the AHRC)  
AHRC - Arts and Humanities Research Council  
BBSRC - Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council  
BFI - The British Film Institute  
BT - British Telecom  
CEO – Chief Executive Officer  
CIs - Creative Industries  
CPD – Continuing Professional Development  
EPRS - Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council  
ESRC - Economic and Social Research Council  
Film Club - a national scheme funded by the Home Office to introduce regular film screenings in schools  
First Light - a national scheme funded by the UK Film Council providing production funds for children and young people to make films  
DCMS - Department for Culture Media and Sport  
HEI - Higher Education Institution  
HEFCW – Higher Education Funding Council for Wales  
IP - Intellectual Property  
IRO - Independent Research Organisation  
KT - Knowledge Transfer  
KTN - Knowledge Transfer Network  
LCASE - London Centre for Arts and Cultural Enterprise  
MeCCSA - Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association  
MRC - Medical Research Council  
NERC - Natural Environment Research Council;  
NESTA - National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts  
R&D - Research and Development  
RAE - Research Assessment Exercise  
REF - Research Excellence Framework  
Research Councils – seven government funded agencies investing in mainly UK research in a wide variety of disciplines with an emphasis on medicine, science and technology  
RSA - Regional Screen Agency  
Skillset - the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for the Creative Industries  
STFC - Science and Technology Facilities Council  
TSB - Technology Strategy Board  
UWE - University of the West of England