



# **International Benchmarking Review of UK Social Anthropology**

**An International Assessment of UK Social Anthropology Research**

**Commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council in partnership with the Association of Social Anthropologists and the Royal Anthropological Institute**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## FOREWORD

In 2005, the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Association of Social Anthropologists and the Royal Anthropological Institute agreed to work in partnership to benchmark the quality and impact of Social Anthropology research in the UK against international standards. This is the first in a series of ESRC sponsored assessments that will cover major social science disciplines in the UK.

The Council and Learned Societies were joined by prominent UK academics, research users and funders on a Steering Group to plan and manage the review. The Group appointed an International Panel, under the Chairmanship of Professor Don Brenneis (University of California at Santa Cruz) to make an independent qualitative assessment of the UK's performance and to report on its findings. The Steering Group and International Panel Members are listed at Annex A and B respectively.

The Steering Group has warmly welcomed the Panel's Report. The assessment contained in the following pages provides an impressive account of a strong and vibrant discipline that is a World leader in many areas of research. The extraordinary academic strength of UK Anthropology described here is a testimony to the expertise and commitment of Social Anthropologists at all levels of the discipline.

In underlining the high quality of UK Social Anthropology research, and the important impact it has on wider society, the report also makes recommendations about the future development of the discipline. The Steering Group will give very serious consideration to these points. We also hope that the report will be debated by all those with an interest in the development of Social Anthropology, and that it will provide a focus for extending the enormous contribution described by the International Panel.

We wish to extend our sincere thanks to Professor Brenneis and all the Panel Members for their hard work in producing such an illuminating and insightful report. The Steering Group would also like to thank all those who discussed their work with the Panel or contributed in any way to the review.



Professor Ian Diamond  
Chief Executive  
Economic and Social Research Council



Professor John Gledhill  
Chairman of the Steering Group,  
and Chairman of the ASA

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The core objective of this review was to 'benchmark UK Social Anthropology against international standards', to gain a clearer and empirically grounded understanding of how the quality, visibility, impact, and broader contributions of British Social Anthropology figure within the field worldwide. Further, the benchmarking panel was asked to 'identify ways of enhancing capacity and help[ing] promote future research agendas'. The review was not to lead to a comparative consideration of individual departments but to an account of the field as a whole, one pursued through qualitative research rather than employing limited – and limiting – quantitative metrics. The panel conducted its work at a time of considerable transition in UK academia, and our work represented a major break methodologically with the earlier assessment regimes with which our interlocutors were overly familiar. As an international group, our panel was also able to view the UK scene within an international comparative framework; what might be taken as everyday by our UK colleagues could be – and often was – quite striking and distinctive to panel members. The ESRC provided the panel with a very helpful background report. We also visited twelve departments during our time in the UK and had access both to written materials and the results of departmental and research user surveys. We also could, crucially, rely on our own expertise – years of reading in the field, conducting research, meeting with colleagues both in our home countries and internationally – to work towards a picture of the field in the UK.

Central to this picture is the very strong, significant, and consequential profile of research in UK Social Anthropology. Clearly the UK has been one of the intellectual heartlands of Anthropology; the quality of current work remains very high and reflects the very lively pluralism of UK departments, scholars, and practitioners. The panel noted a lengthy but not exhaustive list of areas of particular strength, topics in which UK Social Anthropology was indeed an international leader:

- Kinship, especially in regard to emergent phenomena such as new reproductive technologies
- Social institutions, and especially questions of law, conflict, politics and human rights within wider contemporary arenas
- The ethnography of complex organizations and policy
- Regional studies
- Material culture
- Aesthetics and performance
- Anthropological film both as medium and analytical approach
- Groundbreaking work in reshaping ethnographic museums, as sites for research, as topics of research, and as crucial institutions for public outreach and engagement
- An emergent rethinking of relationships between Social and Biological Anthropology
- Medical Anthropology
- A very lively and productive interface between academic and applied Social Anthropology
- Anthropology of and within international development
- Human/environment relations
- New models of collaborative research and pedagogy

In sum, British Social Anthropology is producing excellent research: innovative, widely read and used, drawing very effectively on classical strengths of the field in addressing emergent questions of critical scholarly and applied significance (and, in so doing, transforming the ways in which the field works). Again, this is not an exhaustive list, but the panel hopes it suggests the remarkable range of areas in which UK Social Anthropologists are playing world-leading roles.

In terms of research capacity, it is clear that Social Anthropology, despite the absence of A-level examinations, is in fact quite popular as an undergraduate course. At the postgraduate level, it is equally clear that the relative paucity of postgraduate fellowships – for both UK and non-UK students – has a dramatic limiting effect and very likely discourages many of the most promising students from pursuing Masters and Doctoral work. Given the length of time often involved in rigorous preparation, fieldwork, analysis, and writing, the 1+3 year funding model also seemed to pose particular challenges for Social Anthropology; the panel is particularly pleased that the ESRC is reconsidering the optimal length of pre-doctoral support funding, taking the nature of disciplinary practice into appropriate account. At the postdoctoral level, those fellowships available are both much appreciated and put to very good use; we regret there are not more, as postdoctoral support seems particularly crucial for scholars moving into a very competitive academic job market. The broader job market for Social Anthropology Ph.D.s seems quite strong – in part because of academic positions within Anthropology, in part because of Anthropology's considerable success as a 'exporter' discipline whose Ph.D.s are actively recruited into academic positions in other fields, and in large part because of a particularly 'vibrant' market for anthropologists outside the academy – in government, NGOs, business, and elsewhere.

The impact of UK Social Anthropology can be seen in many areas. Even at the undergraduate level, it is evident that Social Anthropological training helps individuals develop not only specific skills but also modal sensibilities, orientations towards particular ways of paying attention to the world and thinking within it. Among these qualities are lateral thinking, a capacity for understanding and working within a complex and multicultural world, and becoming increasingly perceptive about the subtleties – and consequences – of styles of social interaction. Social Anthropology has also had a signal effect in development policy and practice within the UK and beyond, and Social Anthropologists have become key figures in human rights, asylum, and other justice-related work. When viewed from our external perspective, UK Social Anthropology further seems considerably more recognized in terms of policy consultations, 'cultural' briefings, and expert testimony. The dramatic transformation of ethnographic museums is also making the field much more accessible to and relevant for schoolchildren and citizens.

Our recommendations have to do with how best to encourage the field to play to – and support it in building on – its remarkable strengths. First, given the high level of undergraduate interest, expanding the number of quota and other awards for postgraduate study seems critical. We also encourage the ESRC and other funders to be willing not only to entertain but also actively to encourage imaginative and promising proposals. Small responsive grants seem particularly appropriate for catalyzing innovative research, and larger responsive grants that involve more investment than the usual ethnographic fieldwork should also be supported, as they could make possible truly multisided yet deeply grounded research on key transnational processes and practices. Making it clear that funding agencies

are willing to take on and support somewhat higher risk projects, ones in which the outcomes are not always routinely predictable but that could lead to real breakthroughs. Additional funding for post-doctoral scholars and the opportunity for applied anthropologists to return to academic settings to pursue scholarship in tandem with practice would be invaluable.

Finally, in returning to our qualitative charge, we want to note several procedural elements of a broadly qualitative review. First, any measures and evaluations of a discipline should be understood vis-à-vis the specific context and characteristics of that discipline. One size doesn't fit all, and the meaning of any measurement is certain to be discipline-specific. Second, quantified proxies can be mischievous; letting one variable stand for an entire universe often leads to real misunderstanding. And any measurable variables should be considered not only in relation to each other but also, more significantly, as complement to broader qualitative findings. Third, comparative perspectives, whether cross-nationally within the same discipline or across disciplines within the UK, are invaluable. Finally, central to the success of a large-scale qualitative review such as this is that it involves a group of colleagues in serious inquiry, reflection and conversation. This really has been a deliberative process, one in which we have been very fortunate in our interlocutors, within the panel itself, at the ESRC, and, especially, among British Social Anthropologists. Such collaborative deliberation not only allows for but requires taking time, context, disciplinary cultures, and current practice into serious and subtle account. A crucial characteristic of any qualitative review is the necessity of such shared thinking and argument, a kind of productive deliberation too easily circumvented by reliance on the reductive measures characteristic of more routine reviews.

## SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

The core objective of this review, to quote the letter of September 27, 2005, from Professors Ian Diamond and John Gledhill inviting the visiting panel's participation, is 'to benchmark UK Social Anthropology against international standards', that is, to gain a clearer and empirically grounded understanding of how the quality, visibility, impact, and broader contributions of British Social Anthropology figure within the field worldwide. A further goal of such benchmarking reviews, of which this has been the first to be sponsored by the ESRC, is to consider both likely and possible future trajectories for the field within the UK and, particularly, 'to identify ways of enhancing capacity and help promote future research agendas'. These goals imply a range of crucial questions: How good is contemporary Social Anthropology in the UK, what is its international standing, and what particularly significant strengths, foci, and gaps are evident? What kinds of evidence are available, and how can such evidence most effectively be explored and used in providing an illuminating and useful assessment? How might the discipline most effectively be developed, and what courses of action might be suggested for multiple actors: departments and the profession, university administrators, funding agencies, and current and future users of anthropological knowledge? While this benchmarking review was commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council in partnership with the Association of Social Anthropologists and the Royal Anthropological Institute and is intended to be useful in the ESRC's strategic planning, both the ESRC and panel members trust that it will be of interest and value to other funding agencies, stakeholders, administrators, and colleagues within the discipline.

Two further general elements of our charge should be noted. First, this benchmarking is a review of the field as a whole within the United Kingdom. As our charge notes, it is 'important to emphasize that the discipline as a whole is being assessed, not individual departments or just ESRC investments'. We were asked not to rank or otherwise measure departments against each other but to locate UK Social Anthropology within the discipline worldwide. This is a real and significant departure from earlier, more routine forms of comparative assessment and of the differential rewards that such practices resulted in for departments. While the general structure of our review drew in large part on visits to selected individual departments and on supplementary materials from other departments and research users, our goal was consistently to get a stronger, more subtle, and empirically better grounded sense of the field as a whole.

A second key element of the benchmarking was that we were specifically asked to pursue it as a qualitative exercise. As our charge stated, 'The qualitative nature of the review is particularly important. It will help balance the UK Government's increasing use of metrics, especially citation counts, to make judgments about research impact and standing'. Or, as Ian Diamond noted in his comments at the Steering Committee meeting of August 10, 2005, relying 'on qualitative rather than quantitative measures [was necessary] in order to complement the assessment made by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and avoid some of the problems which the ESRC has already identified with existing quantitative indications such as citation indexes'. The ESRC is not alone in its concerns regarding such quantitative measures. A series of panel studies sponsored by the National Academies in the United States have questioned the reliability of tools such as impact factors, especially when



deployed in short term evaluations. As one report noted, 'Evaluating federal research programs...is challenging because we do not know how to measure knowledge while it is being generated, and its practical use might not occur until many years after the research occurs and cannot be predicted' (COSEPUP 2002: 1). Or, as a leading scholar in research evaluation has suggested, '...it is not simply that the wrong things may be measured...but also that those doing and using the measures do not always understand what they mean' (Feller 2002: 442). Recurrently these recent US reports encourage an increasing emphasis on deliberative or clinical models for evaluation rather than relying upon the development and application of quantitative metrics.

The benchmarking review of Social Anthropology is the first such qualitative review to be conducted for the ESRC. This is necessarily something of a prototype exercise, then, and our discipline of Social Anthropology is definitively associated with qualitative research methods and especially with ethnography, the long-term, intensive description and analysis of complexly embedded relationships between local contexts and the specifics of social and cultural practice. The panel therefore thought it might be useful explicitly to lay out both some of the broader issues of research practice and interpretation our findings raised and the specific methods and resources we drew upon.

One critical contextual aspect of our review had to do with a degree of possible instability in the broader higher education scene in the UK. During the week of May 14-19, when we were visiting the UK, at least four things were up in the air, leading to considerable uncertainty: an impending major fee hike in the offing, a boycott of assessment procedures by union members at all universities, the advent of FEC (Full Economic Costing), and possible dramatic changes in the RAE or even its replacement by a more routinized and quantitative system of metrics. Capturing a comprehensive picture of any community at a particular moment in time - exploring the 'ethnographic present' - is challenging in the most stable of situations. The ethnographic present of our review was even more shifting and volatile than usual; we were in some ways benchmarking on a seismic terrain, one in which the conditions of funding, evaluation, local administration, and national policy could shift dramatically.

A second key contextual element had to do with the crucial ways in which the benchmarking review differed from the RAE. Central to the definition of our benchmarking was that it was not the RAE; we were neither making competitive judgments nor relying on the same kinds of measures and practices. Even so, the ESRC's goals in pursuing the benchmarking were not always understood by those being benchmarked, despite considerable intelligent, energetic, and good faith efforts on the part of the ESRC, the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA), steering committee members, and department heads. As the benchmarking is a somewhat novel sort of review, it is not surprising that scholars would assimilate it to more familiar models. Several panel members noted with concern one possible consequence of the uncertainty felt in some departments concerning the goals and implications of the benchmarking, namely that colleagues seemed at times focused on presenting a brave and unified face rather than addressing broader concerns about the future of the discipline rather than the department. It therefore seems critical that the goals and procedures of future benchmarking exercises be framed even more energetically: as non-competitive and as, again to cite our introductory materials, intended to 'strengthen the field' rather than to weigh programs comparatively.

Third, that we were an international panel and therefore brought a variety of external perspectives to bear on the UK situation proved invaluable. While on the one hand we were at times ignorant of or mistaken about various institutional and historical factors, these factors were, in our view, more than outweighed by the benefits of comparison and contrast that our various viewpoints afforded. While, for example, many of our UK colleagues thought that they had relatively minimal impact in policy-making or public visibility in the media, when compared with the United States they appeared considerably more successful in both regards. Similarly, only because of our comparative perspectives were we able to recognize and articulate, as we have done below, the remarkable range of topics and research areas in which UK Social Anthropology clearly is a world-leader.

A final, related aspect of our external viewpoint has to do with the possibilities of reframing and in so doing extending the semantic ambit of key terms in the benchmarking process itself. In part this is because rethinking assumedly transparent terms is a hallmark of anthropological analysis. In larger part, however, it is because what we learned in the course of our various campus conversations made it clear that, when it comes to evaluations, one size does not fit all. When considered vis-à-vis the social sciences more generally, Social Anthropology is distinctive along several dimensions. For example, the time required for design, preparation (including language learning), fieldwork, analysis, and publication is considerable and likely to be longer than for other fields; expectations concerning rates of productivity and research 'turn around times' should accordingly be tailored to the field's temporalities. While the time required for anthropological research is considerable, the financial scale for funding such research is often much lower than in other social sciences (and certainly in the natural sciences). In financial terms, Social Anthropological research recurrently provides a bigger bang for fewer bucks, a factor that should be taken into account when thinking about what kinds of risks a funding agency might be willing – or eager – to take. How one might weigh questions of impact and value might similarly vary across fields, a point to which we will return below. We are not claiming here that Social Anthropology is singular in its singularity. This is rather to argue that review measures and practices take into account the local particulars of each discipline or interdiscipline – and think through strategies appropriate for and likely to be revelatory about each field.

The specific methodology for our review had several elements. First, the steering committee commissioned a briefing paper from Dr. David Mills (Birmingham) providing current data on disciplinary research funding, staff and student demographic trends, and career paths in both the academy and non-academic professions, as well as a very useful introduction to the RAE system and the results of the 2001 RAE. Mills's paper (2006) and the other literature that it indexed were invaluable in giving us a sense of the contours of the field. When compared, for example, with the US, it is clear that UK Social Anthropology has over the past twenty or so years developed an empirically rich, reflective, and critical literature on the field itself within the context of higher education and research policy and practice, one deeply grounded in both social and institutional contexts.

The steering committee also laid out a clear set of criteria and topics recommended for structuring both our meetings with departments and our final report. In addition, we were provided with responses to a questionnaire distributed to Heads of Departments, as well as the results of a research user or stakeholder survey. Perhaps most significant in terms of background knowledge, however, were the breadth and depth of knowledge of anthropology

that the eight members of the review panel brought to the benchmarking; we represented a considerable variety of topical and regional expertise and were all quite familiar with the contributions of British Social Anthropology, both historically and in the present, to the development of our field.

The central element of the review consisted of visits to twelve departments of Social Anthropology, departments that had been selected by the steering committee. The entire panel visited the LSE department. A 'northern team' then met with departments from Queen's University Belfast, Durham, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen (who kindly travelled to Edinburgh for the discussion). The 'southern team' met with departments from Goldsmiths (who kindly came to LSE), SOAS, Kent, Sussex, Oxford, Cambridge, and Manchester. Each of the twelve departments had provided its own background materials for the committee. In each of these visits we worked to explore three topics of central importance to our charge: research issues, research capacity, and impacts on policy and practice. We were able to spend three or four hours at each site, meeting separately with academic staff (or some portion thereof) and with postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows. Formats varied from university to university, with some departments making fairly elaborate presentations and others moving more directly into conversation with the committee. In both kinds of meetings our colleagues were consistently articulate, reflective, and forthcoming. We found the presentations helpful but considered the discussions to be particularly illuminating, especially those with postgraduate students and postdoctoral fellows whose visions of and commitment to the field seem particularly significant when thinking about its future course.

After a brief discussion of key elements of the current demographic shape of the discipline, we will address the four key criteria we were asked to address by the steering committee: research quality, research capacity, impacts, and the future course of the field.

### **Background Information**

Background information provided to the Panel (Mills 2006) provided a very helpful, concise, yet comprehensive statistical picture of the contemporary field. We want here briefly to highlight a few key elements of the broader picture he presents. First, Social Anthropology is a quite small field in the UK. If the number of departments is used as a measure, there are approximately 20 departments with approximately 200 permanent staff. Social Anthropology is, Mills notes, an 'exporter' discipline, one whose Ph.D.s are often hired by departments in other disciplines, so the actual number of Social Anthropologists in academic positions is higher, although difficult to ascertain. Social Anthropology is exceptionally research intensive, with '93% of all staff...submitted to the 2001 RAE as active research scholars' (Mills 2006: 4). According to the 2001 RAE, Social Anthropology was the most research intensive of all the social sciences. Despite this high level of research activity, Social Anthropologists receive a smaller than expected share of research income. Mills suggests that this is 'because Anthropologists are less likely to wish to access funding sources available for policy and evaluation research carried out within the practice-based disciplines' (Mills 2006: 2). It could also reflect the low cost of Social Anthropological research relative to the other social sciences. As we suggest above, field research in Social Anthropology often delivers major returns for relatively minor investments. An input measure such as aggregate funding pounds might not be as helpful as, for example, output measures such as the number of proposals funded or the range and quality of resulting publications.

## SECTION TWO: RESEARCH QUALITY

Central to the benchmarking panel's charge are questions concerning the quality of contemporary British Social Anthropology: How does it compare globally, what are its particular strengths and sites of leadership, where might there be gaps or weakness, and how might we characterize the research environment? In this section we will first turn to the broad question of the discipline's global standing, then summarize the striking range of areas in which UK Social Anthropology is clearly a leader, and finally address the issues of research agendas and environment.

UK Social Anthropology plays a very strong and significant role in Anthropology worldwide, producing research of very high quality that is read and cited widely, training a very international and accomplished range of postgraduate students, and providing intellectual and institutional leadership within Europe and globally. It further continues to shape the field globally by sustaining leading scholarly journals, among them *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *Critique of Anthropology*, and *Anthropological Theory*. This salience reflects the central role that it has long played in the development of Anthropology as a discipline worldwide. It also derives from the continuing high quality and value of current research, and from the continuing distinctive intellectual style that it brings to the global scene. One of the hallmarks of the current field is its intellectual pluralism. As discussed below, UK Social Anthropologists not only work on a wide range of topics but also have been instrumental in catalyzing and shaping work internationally in these areas. Such pluralism of focus and approach is one of the hallmarks of a healthy discipline; that it flourishes within such a small field is even more of an accomplishment. It also is often the hallmark of a lively and productive department. While department colleagues may share a distinctive group profile in terms of particular foci and concerns, the exploration of such common ground is made all the more fruitful by the varied perspectives at play. At the same time, certain recurrent and unifying themes were evident both in our reading of contemporary UK scholarship and, more signally, in our departmental conversations. One central idiom was that of a 'British empirical tradition'. While the specific meanings and connotations associated with this phrase varied, it consistently implied a particularly strong shared commitment to grounded inquiry conducted over relatively long periods (and with periodic revisits), in local languages, and with an eye primarily to social relations and forms and practices of social organization both in the ethnographic moment and over time. The centrality of the social was another recurrent theme, one that our colleagues often claimed as a root of UK Social Anthropology's somewhat complementary role vis-à-vis more culture-centred traditions in the US and France. A third hallmark, one more evident in the ways in which our UK colleagues approach research than as a topic of explicit discussion, lies in the kinds of close reasoning and analysis brought to bear on key interpretive questions. Here again it is a particular kind of groundedness, one having to do with the deeply contextualized and socially situated meanings and intentions at play within a particular ethnographic case (however construed) that is both distinctive and invaluable. This kind of detailed interrogation through the specific, that is, working from and through cases rather than from a more abstract or philosophical perspective again complements other national styles in Anthropological argument.

We want to turn now to the remarkable range of areas in which, despite their small numbers, UK Social Anthropologists are clearly leading actors worldwide. Some of these areas are defined topically, some reflect particularly innovative ways of working across disciplinary boundaries, and some are marked by how effectively they link academic research with practice and policy. This far from exhaustive list strongly demonstrates the vitality of the current research agenda of our UK colleagues. These are remarkably active scholars defining and pursuing research areas of global consequence.

### 1. *Kinship*

A long term focus in UK Social Anthropology – and a central element in its concern with the social – has been kinship. In recent years UK scholars have totally revitalized this area of inquiry, considering such emergent phenomena as new reproductive technologies and the broader social transformations with which they are entangled, as well as shaping subtle and innovative strategies for re-examining core concepts such as gender and sexuality.

### 2. *Law, conflict resolution and politics*

Similarly, a long term investment in the description and analysis of social institutions in the context of traditional community studies has served as an effective base for pursuing highly innovative and consequential work on questions of law, conflict resolution, and politics within much wider contemporary arenas. One central emergent focus here has to do with intellectual and cultural property, especially as such questions are necessarily rearticulated in transnational webs of use, circulation, and value. Further. UK Anthropology has become a leader in the study of human rights, the complex relationships between culture and rights, refugee and migrant communities, and asylum. This has also been a significant point of connection between academic work and engaged practice; the role of UK Social Anthropologists in preparing asylum briefs, serving as expert witnesses, and otherwise bringing their scholarship and knowledge to bear on very concrete human dilemmas is striking.

### 3. *Ethnography of complex organisations and policy*

A related area of UK leadership lies in the ethnography of complex organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, and of practices of policy-making and their consequences within these organizations. While, for instance, UK Anthropologists have historically been very active in European research at the level of local communities, they have also become leaders in revelatory ethnographic work within complex Europe-wide institutions such as EU agencies. Perhaps because of twenty-odd years spent within particularly active regimes of audit and evaluation, UK Anthropologists have become especially astute and subtle as both ethnographers of and actors in emergent regimes of funding, assessment, and regulation within higher education and research policy. This work is path breaking not only in terms of understanding kinds of institutional practice that are becoming central worldwide but also in producing thought-provoking model ethnographies of knowledge production and circulation in our very complicated contemporary world. And, for global Anthropology, these studies provide a remarkable reflection on the material conditions of our individual work lives and of the transforming disciplinary worlds we inhabit.

#### 4. *Regional studies*

A fourth area in which UK Social Anthropology plays a distinctively consequential role has to do with regional studies. In part this is tied to a disciplinary commitment to historical training, intensive language learning, and ongoing research engagement; in part it reflects archival and bibliographic resources linked to earlier British colonial interests. Not all parts of the world are equally represented, but, for those regions, especially South Asia and Africa, where there has been major support, both the training and the research are of extraordinary quality, setting a very high standard for such work internationally. Somewhat less extensively studied regions, especially Melanesia and Latin America, have also been exceptionally important in UK Social Anthropology; with additional support, research in these areas could become even more significant.

#### 5. *Material culture*

Material culture has been a further very important nexus for leading research that has, in many ways, defined the topic worldwide. Drawing upon a variety of theoretical perspectives, UK scholars have examined the social life of material culture, considering processes of production, circulation, use, identity practices, and value-making in which the material figures centrally, whether in face-to-face communities, within a transnational neoliberal economy, or at the inescapable and recurring points of their intersection. Social practice – exchange, representation, advertising, aesthetic assessment, obsolescence – is key to these analyses; items of material culture are productively considered as embedded in and, at times, themselves serving as agents in, social relations. Materiality as a notion, along with related concerns with aesthetics, performance, and representation, seem to have played key roles in infusing a new concern with cultural analysis into the UK scene; 'culture' has clearly become very much part of research in all the departments we were in conversation with.

#### 6. *Aesthetics and performance*

Linked to these concerns for material culture has been a revitalized and internationally consequential interest in research on aesthetics, visual art, dance, music, and related performance traditions, whether long term or emergent. What is striking here is the subtle commitment to understanding for the social groundings and generativity of aesthetic practices, making for a particularly rich consideration of such forms as both cultural and deeply social phenomena.

#### 7. *Anthropological film*

The UK has long been a leader in the area of anthropological film, helping pioneer film as both a powerful medium for ethnographic representation and as a revelatory site for reflection, critique, and analysis. Several centres have long concentrated very effectively on both dimensions of ethnographic film, and it is clear that, in contrast to other national situations, there is often a very effective relationship between anthropological filmmakers and media. In terms of public outreach and interest, of presenting complex, subtle, and often very aesthetically compelling ethnographic arguments to a very broad audience, UK anthropological filmmakers have really set the international standard.

### 8. *Ethnographic museums*

The effervescence in the anthropology of material culture has been paralleled by a path breaking rethinking and remaking of ethnographic museums in the UK: as sites for research, as topics of research in themselves, and as crucial institutions for public outreach and engagement. Here again the embeddedness of material life in the social is central, whether in displays that locate objects in the contexts, both tangible and intellectual, in which they figure, in exhibits that wrestle with questions of how best to speak to and about the social and cultural lives of increasingly diverse British museum goers, or in the development of web sites and other forms of curious entry into the remarkable resources these museums afford. UK Social Anthropology has been a leader, whether through museums or in more traditional scholarly work, in making clear both the importance of material culture and its value as an entry point into broader forms of social analysis.

### 9. *Relationships between Social and Biological Anthropology*

One of the more striking features of UK Social Anthropology is the imaginative and promising rethinking – in different ways in different departments – of its relationship with Biological Anthropology. One point of productive contact has to do with the study of cognition as at the same time embedded in social relationships and deeply tied to brain structure and models of neural processing. The links here are clearly more with neuropsychology than with linguistics, as has generally been the case in the US. Another point of connection and conversation is through research concerning evolutionary models, where the possible linkages and configurations being explored are quite distinctive. And a third key junction lies in medical anthropology, where very concrete questions of bodies and social practice figure critically. These connections between Biological and Social Anthropology – cognitive, evolutionary, medical – are at present more emergent than fully realized, but the committee thinks this is an area in which the UK is likely to be a leader.

### 10. *Medical Anthropology*

Medical Anthropology has proved to be another area of leadership. Apart from the intellectual merit of individual research agendas in themselves, UK work in Medical Anthropology has also built significant bridges. Some of these bridges lead to other sub disciplines within Anthropology; Medical Anthropology provides, along with work in educational research, a variety of sites in which perspectives and analytical models from Linguistic Anthropology are very effectively being brought into play. Other bridges lead to training and research with medical and public health practitioners. It is clear that Medical Anthropology is an increasingly significant participant in and shaper of interdisciplinary research. It is also clear that Medical Anthropology provides a crucial and consequential nexus with practice and applied work.

### 11. *Applied Social Anthropology*

More broadly, the liveliness and productivity of the interface between academic and applied Social Anthropology are striking. In contrast to many other countries, and especially the US, several things are evident. First, there are fewer – and somewhat more porous – barriers between academic departments and the range of agencies, NGOs, and other institutions

within which applied anthropologists work. Second, reflecting very strong student interest, departments have developed Masters Programs that effectively prepare students for work in a number of specific areas of practice. At the doctoral level, an estimated half of graduates move into practice with very strong academic credentials indeed. Third, some of the most interesting and significant scholarship recognized within the academic world comes from research in the applied sector. The situation is not perfect: Many doctoral students choose to pursue Social Anthropology because of experience in and commitments to applied work, and they suggested a need for more practice-focused coursework; making the transition back in from practice to academia is made difficult by, among other factors, the RAE-driven emphasis on mainstream scholarly publications in hiring; and, although Social Anthropologists in practice often continue to draw upon strongly ethnographic sensibilities, they may no longer be identified as 'Anthropologists'. From an internationally comparative perspective, however, the ongoing consequential exchange between academy and practice is extraordinary, and, crucially, the shape and trajectory of scholarly and scientific work are strongly affected by applied research. UK Social Anthropology here provides a model for Anthropology worldwide, as more and more of our Ph.D.s move beyond the university, and as the value of our styles of inquiry for wrestling with real world problems is increasingly recognized.

### *12. International development*

The exceptional quality and value of such applied/academic engagement is nowhere more evident than in relationship to international development. Several schools offer courses specifically in this area, and there are several very visible centres for research. It became clear to us that, for a variety of historical and contemporary reasons, Social Anthropology became a quite significant part of the development scene. DfID (Department for International Development), for example, has been marked by a very significant Anthropological presence, one that led to a Department-wide concern with the social, political, and cultural dimensions of development, with the local-level consequences of development policy and practice, and, especially, with non-econometric ways of examining the costs, benefits, and less immediately apparent implications of specific choices. Here again the contrast with the US, where economists dominate both federal and NGO approaches to development, is particularly marked. As a European colleague on the panel noted, the 'British model' for development, that is, one that draws heavily on anthropological perspectives, is very highly regarded by aid agencies elsewhere and is serving increasingly as a model for more effective – and less destructive – work. This is an area of exceptional intellectual leadership by UK Social Anthropology, and one that clearly speaks very powerfully beyond the university.

### *13. Human/environment relations*

A final topical focus for highly significant work spanning, again, the scholarly and applied worlds, has to do with human/environment relations. Linked in one direction to classical questions of nature and culture, in another to issues of cognition and ecological perception, and in another to very current concerns with development, global climate change, and the ongoing transformation of large-scale landscapes, this is very exciting work indeed.



#### *14. Collaborative research and pedagogy*

As these latter few highlights suggest, British Social Anthropology's current intellectual strength is linked in productive ways with a capacity for and interest in working collaboratively: with the local communities and consultants at the heart of traditional forms of ethnographic research, with practitioners in a variety of fields, with Anthropological colleagues outside the academy, and with scholars and scientists in other disciplines. One very exciting recent development has been the formalization of serious collaborative research and pedagogy through programs bringing deeply knowledgeable intellectuals from various non-Western traditions to UK institutions to teach, research, and write with UK colleagues and students. This could be a signal move toward making a discipline that should, almost by definition, be truly transnational move closer to realizing its promise.

In sum, then, British Social Anthropology is producing excellent research: innovative, widely read and used, drawing very effectively on classical strengths of the field in addressing emergent questions of critical scholarly and applied significance (and, in so doing, transforming the ways in which the field works). Again, this is not an exhaustive list. In part this reflects the role of Social Anthropology as a significant 'exporter' discipline; many social scientists trained in Social Anthropology are imaginative and consequential leaders in research in such areas as science and technology studies, where they are often affiliated with an inter- or transdisciplinary research group or department rather than an Anthropology program. We hope this list suggests the remarkable range of areas in which British Social Anthropologists are playing world-leading roles.

The panel was also asked to consider whether areas of weakness in terms of either coverage or quality were evident in UK Social Anthropology. Committee discussion here focused on elements that could perhaps better be characterized either as differences in modal intellectual style or as gaps with a long disciplinary history. In regard to the first category, that of intellectual style, several panel members suggested that our UK colleagues seemed, at least in their conversations with us, not to foreground 'theory' per se. This may well have been in part an artefact of the review situation itself and the kinds of questions we were asking. It also may well reflect a widely shared and very strong commitment to grounded, analytical investigation in interaction with an eclectic range of interpretive resources. At the same time, several British Social Anthropologists are among those theorists within the discipline most frequently cited worldwide. Part of the issue here is, we think, that theory is a highly polysemic term, taken frequently as a given while varying dramatically in its assumed meanings and implications. Certainly a shared commitment to working upward from cases and the concrete was evident in our conversations; this empirical grounding has shaped a field marked by subtle, systematic, and innovative theoretical approaches that differ from and complement what is taken as theory in some other national traditions.

A second observation, and one that speaks to concerns noted in earlier reports on the discipline that too much research might be pursued 'at home,' was that there was relatively little research on majoritarian cultures anywhere, whether in the UK, Europe, or further afield. This might reflect a longstanding division of intellectual territory between Sociology and Social Anthropology, but it is clear that the singular methodological and analytical strengths of Social Anthropology could be very productively brought to bear on majorities as well as minority or marginalized communities.

Further, in contrast to France, Mexico, and the US, such fields as ethno-history and historical anthropology have been less fully developed, despite the liveliness of contemporary work in the UK by social and cultural historians, many of whom explicitly acknowledge the anthropological literature and anthropological perspectives for their own work.

From a US perspective perhaps the most striking gap, and one with a quite long history, is the absence of linguistic anthropological (or, for that matter, linguistic) influences on Social Anthropological scholarship. This absence is all the more marked as our sense is that both a field-wide concern for languages and a commitment to supporting their learning are more robust in the UK than elsewhere. The resources available, whether in one's own institution or through cooperative arrangement, are remarkable, and it is clear that real fluency are a hallmark of the UK ethnographic tradition. Historically, linguistic anthropology and cultural anthropology co-evolved in quite distinctive ways in the North American context, with language (and particularly lexicon) being consistently taken as providing key epistemological resources for wrestling with issues of belief, world view, and 'culture' more broadly; this is not a history shared with Social Anthropology in the UK. In recent decades, however, Linguistic Anthropology has become as concerned with the social as with the cultural. Influenced by sociolinguistics, the ethnography of speaking, and the family of philosophical approaches centred around speech act theory and questions of performativity, contemporary US Linguistic Anthropology has come to focus on language as social practice, as, indeed, a central and far from transparent element in those aspects of grounded social life and relationships so central to the British tradition. We are not trying to make a dramatic case for linguistic approaches here; rather, we want to suggest that earlier apparent incompatibilities may be less marked nowadays – and that taking language into account in these ways might help enrich even further the kinds of work that UK Social Anthropologists pursue so well. At present, an interest in language as not just medium for but interpretively rich dimension of social life in itself is most evident in the UK in several 'hyphenated' areas, especially in regard to educational research and in Medical Anthropology, where it has led to innovative understandings not only of routine interaction but also of the complex and frequently consequential misreadings possible – and often inevitable – in a multicultural world and within large-scale bureaucratic institutions.

What should be evident in the preceding discussion is that, at the same time despite and perhaps to some extent because of the discipline's small size and the relatively low level of research funding pursued, UK Social Anthropologists constitute a very active, innovative, accomplished and consequential community of scholars doing, on the whole, exceptionally fine work and, in a surprising range of areas, leading scholarship and science worldwide. In the panel's view, sustaining such a high level of activity and accomplishment is very challenging and might well prove exhausting unless greater support is made available. Such support is not solely a matter of money; recurring rounds of preparing for, participating in, and responding to assessment can take a heavy toll and make finding the time for research, reflection and writing very difficult. Excellence in research is, further, spread across a variety of institutions and departments, although post-graduate training remains numerically dominated by a handful of the older departments. In terms of a notional expense/benefit comparison, UK Social Anthropology produces a striking range of excellent research at remarkably low cost to funders. As we'll suggest below in more detail below, for funders to

work to broaden the funding base a bit and, especially, to make it clear that they would be willing to welcome, consider, and fund potentially higher risk but promising research would be, we think, very wise.

### SECTION THREE: RESEARCH CAPACITY

That evaluating the quality and significance of contemporary research in UK Social Anthropology was relatively easy is in itself tribute to how widely circulated and consequential such scholarship is – and to how articulate and engaging the viva voce conversations regarding current work were. Questions of research capacity and of the very complex and frequently changing frameworks shaping capacity were considerably more challenging for our international committee. Our comments reflect our background materials (Mills 2006), data supplied by the departments and by the ESRC, and our conversations with colleagues. We are not, however, so much synthesizing data here as making a set of observations and suggestions.

Although there is no A-level examination in Social Anthropology and therefore no structurally immediate constituency for the field as an undergraduate course of study, Social Anthropology is in fact very popular. Demand is exceptionally high at many institutions, and especially at those Scottish universities with a four rather than three year program, where students can 'discover' and pursue the field more easily; at some schools undergraduate enrolment must be limited. The Royal Anthropological Institute has been working to make A-level courses and testing available in Social Anthropology; should this laudable effort succeed, the demand would be even higher.

At the postgraduate level the picture becomes more complicated, and several potential problems become evident. Most departments offer a good range of focused Masters Programs, some intended primarily to train students for applied work, others clearly seen as high level preparation for doctoral work. Enrolment tends to be very good in these programs, and, in contrast to the undergraduate programs, tends to include a considerable number of 'local,' i.e., EU, as well as UK and non-European students. Several panellists suggested that, especially given the number of EU students, taking the implications of the Bologna Accords and other European policies concerning the comparability of Masters degrees into account was crucial.

A cause for concern has to do with the relatively low number of UK students who make the transition into Ph.D. courses in Social Anthropology, although this number has increased over the past decade. Recent research (Spencer, Jepson and Mills 2005) suggests that only around 43% of Anthropology Ph.D. completers over the past decade held UK nationality (Mills 2006: 9). This appears to us to be primarily a result of the unavailability of funding for doctoral work – and of the limited length of time for which funding is available. ESRC quota awards are invaluable but quite few in number. Patterns of allocation appear somewhat inevitably to favour longer established and larger programs. We should also note here that relatively low salaries appear to make it increasingly difficult to make senior staff appointments.

In doctoral education, money and time are closely linked, and there was considerable conversation about the 1+3 year model and the ESRC policy on submission rates. While our colleagues recognized that the 1+3 model represented a significant improvement over the situation six years previously, many nonetheless expressed serious concern about whether this length of funding afforded sufficient time for adequate field preparation, research, and

subsequent analysis. Given the necessary emphasis on language fluency, the importance of extended residence in the site under study, and the time demands associated with the reflective analysis central to ethnography, is this an adequate length of time? And, further, does what was assumed to be briefer fieldwork put UK Ph.D.s at a comparative disadvantage in the academic job market? Empirical evidence is hard to come by on this question, although some narratives suggested that candidates with US doctorates fared better even in recent hiring in the UK. It is clearly the case that periods of eighteen months or two years are necessary for some Ph.D. projects if they are to be comparable to the best Ph.D. work at comparable institutions in Europe and the US. It is also certain that the greater temporal leeway in the US does give advanced students the chance to get more work into print before receiving their degrees; they also, however, may well need to serve as teaching assistants while writing up, as relatively little support is available post-research. We understand that the ESRC has just formed a new committee to be chaired by Professor Jonathan Spencer and charged with considering the optimal length of pre-doctoral support funding. This is a very good step; whatever their recommendations might be, it is crucial that the ESRC and other funding agencies seriously consider variation from field to field, as in this instance.

Both academic staff and postdoctoral fellows were enthusiastic about the ESRC and other postdoctoral funding. The support is very good and makes it possible for recent Ph.D.s to write, publish, and, in some cases, teach, putting them at a considerable advantage when looking for academic posts. A number of postdoctoral fellows particularly noted the importance of being able to teach and encouraged the development of more early career fellowships, whether sponsored by national funding agencies or supported by local institutions. The fellowships that do exist are invaluable and very welcome; everyone, including committee members, wishes there were more of them, especially given the highly competitive market for academic posts.

Several issues arose concerning capacity vis-à-vis applied Social Anthropology. Both published studies and recurrent conversations made it clear that there is, to quote one colleague, a 'vibrant' market for Social Anthropology Ph.D.s outside the academy, whether in government, NGOs, business, or other areas. It is very difficult to track post-doctoral careers, especially several years out, but, both in the US and the UK, it appears that around 40% of recent Anthropology Ph.D.s find long term employment outside the academy. The impact of Social Anthropology is closely linked to the work that those going into this market do – and the quality of the impact is shaped in part by the comparatively very strong academic training of practitioners and their continuing interactions with academic programs. One issue raised in this area had to do with the length of time to degree, especially the Ph.D. Several colleagues thought that a relatively short, perhaps specialized applied Anthropology Ph.D. program would be particularly attractive to applicants intending to pursue applied work, in large part because it would provide useful training and enable graduates to move on to practice. The panel's sense is that the strong academic training of Anthropologists working outside the academy is a very positive hallmark of the current UK scene; we were not convinced that such a reduction of already short training and research periods would be beneficial. Perhaps more helpful would be competitive funding that would enable applied Social Anthropologists to return to academic departments as visiting fellows; this could help such practitioners to remain current with the discipline and to sustain their scholarly

trajectories at the same time as it would help keep academic programs engaged with the world of practice.

For ongoing academic staff several issues of research capacity were salient. An increase in the number of relatively small responsive grants would be both welcome and likely to lead to considerably increased research activity. Social Anthropology is a field where pump-priming is often well rewarded; again, small investments can lead to large rewards. The panel thought that funding agencies could also frame such small grant competitions in terms that encouraged somewhat riskier, less quotidian proposals. A general sentiment among our interlocutors was that the costs in time and energy of framing innovative research proposals in the routine language of apparently safe research proposals constituted a real disincentive; explicitly extending the range of welcome types of proposals could have a big pay off in terms of innovation and quality.

## SECTION FOUR: IMPACT ON POLICY AND PRACTICE

The panel was also asked to speak to the impact of Social Anthropology beyond the academy. Here it is particularly helpful to think in imaginative terms about how a field makes a difference – and how we might find evidence of such impact. We want to highlight an often unconsidered dimension of impact that is central to academic practice, i.e., the ways in which teaching in particular fields, even at the undergraduate level, helps students develop not only specific skills but broader modal sensibilities, orientations towards particular ways of paying attention to the world and thinking within it. A remarkable series of papers by Simon Coleman, Bob Simpson, and colleagues (See, for example, Coleman and Simpson 2004; Simpson, Coleman, and Starkey 2004) provides a particularly helpful way into considering the impact Social Anthropology might have. Coleman and his colleagues questioned advanced Social Anthropology undergraduates, many of whom were also working while in university, about how they would characterize what they had learned. They recurrently pointed to a developing fascination with and capacity for lateral thinking, to a greater capacity for understanding – and engaging with – the complex range of perspectives and assumptions at play in a multicultural world, and to a much more subtle sense of daily processes of interaction and social life. Certainly in the US, where the great majority of our undergraduate Anthropologists pursue, on their face, careers in other fields, these are just the elements of anthropological attentiveness we hope for; these studies are quite important in suggesting that, at times at least, we succeed in meeting these goals. And there is a direct link to policy and practice here; if social workers, administrators, health care professionals and others bring to their work such an anthropological set of predispositions, their practice is necessarily different. Even at the undergraduate level, Social Anthropology has many of the qualities of a vocation, a range of ways of engaging the world that continue to infuse practice, experience, and imagination.

There are a number of somewhat more orthodox sites in which the impacts of Social Anthropology are quite evident. As noted above, practice and policy at DfID have been guided in large part by Anthropologists. Beyond this effect in the UK's own agency, this Anthropological perspective has been instrumental in making DfID an attractive model for appropriate development for a number of other national aid agencies, e.g., in Norway. Similarly, Social Anthropologists, whether current academics or their former students, have been very active in areas such as human rights work, asylum cases, cultural property, and cultural defence testimony. In contrast to the US, in the UK applied Social Anthropology is considered part of the main body of the field, as it is in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Scandinavia. And participation, either full-time or intermittently, in policy advising, justice-related research and testimony, and other forms of engagement in the larger public sphere appears highly valued.

Here a quick comparative observation might be helpful. When asked about the extent and impact of their participation in matters of policy and the like, our UK colleagues noted a certain degree of dissatisfaction with their accomplishments, or, perhaps, more fundamentally, with their access to sites where they could make a difference. When, however, we asked them to describe the kinds of more public activities they and their colleagues were involved in, all of us were struck by how active they actually were. Whether through country or 'culture' briefings, expert witnessing, or collaborative consulting with

social service agencies, when compared with other national situations, UK Social Anthropologists were very active, visible, and consequential beyond the academy.

In terms of broader dissemination, the dramatic and intellectually lively transformation of ethnographic museums in recent decades has made a major contribution, especially when changes in exhibits and presentations are considered alongside website and publication development, very heavy use by school and other groups, and community outreach, the UK accomplishment is extraordinary. In another medium, the RAI's bimonthly *Anthropology Today*, has earned a widespread reputation for cogent, lucid, and anthropologically subtle and revealing writing on contemporary topics. It has also, since 1999, achieved a fourteen-fold increase in institutional subscriptions, evidence of interest and engagement well beyond disciplinary limits.

One final recurring topic in regard to impact has to do with the 'invisible anthropologist,' that is, with those who are trained in Social Anthropology and work in various institutional contexts, whether research-focused or applied, but do not explicitly identify themselves as Anthropologists. This is by no means a solely UK phenomenon; many anthropologists in the US, for example, claim they identify themselves as experts on HIV/AIDS, for example, or on agricultural development rather than by their discipline. This does not appear to be a sign of disciplinary disloyalty but rather reflects the ways in which such interdisciplinary worlds of work sort themselves out. That this happens, however, suggests that there is considerable hidden impact out there, that is, that Social Anthropology informs and helps shape policy and practice while not easily identifiable as such. Relatively speaking, indeed, Social Anthropology in the UK is something of a leader in terms of impact, both at home and abroad, especially in Europe. UK Anthropologists, through their ongoing engagements, have modelled how various forms of intellectual activity might most effectively work with each other and how disciplines and their institutional counterparts can develop transnational capacity.



## SECTION FIVE: THE FUTURE

Review panels are, perhaps, especially reluctant when it comes to predicting the future. Judging from the trajectories evident both within UK Social Anthropology and in those institutional frameworks and adjacent disciplines with which it is in ongoing interaction, however, we might make a few comments. Some challenges facing the field have to do with funding, including academic staff having appropriate support for continuing research, some with time and the courses of both training and research in the field, some with institutional stability, some with staffing, and some with recognition. Funding is a relatively transparent issue, especially for UK students hoping to pursue the Ph.D. in Social Anthropology, for Ph.D.s to find postdoctoral positions that allow them the opportunity to write and otherwise prepare themselves to go on the market, and for practitioners to be able to return for academic reinvigoration. In terms of research funding, it is a matter as much of welcoming innovative work as it is of gross amounts available. Anthropological research takes time; preparation is comprehensive, fieldwork is necessarily expansive, and writing up can rarely be accomplished quickly. Progress-to-degree expectations should reflect these disciplinary realities, and assessments such as the RAE might more effectively measure the accomplishments of scholars and their programs if they occurred at wider intervals more consonant with the rhythms of ethnographic work.

As higher education and research have become increasingly the subjects of administration and policy, the possibilities of dramatic shifts in value, expectations, resources, and other practices have also increased. As we noted above, the institutional and governmental contexts can at times best be characterized as constantly shifting ground. UK Social Anthropologists have been remarkably acute and effective in understanding and adapting to such shifts, but such necessary nimbleness can also take considerable time and energy away from the longer term trajectories of both research and pedagogy. Longer time frames and some degree of relative predictability about at least the near future seem critical for nurturing the kinds of extraordinary contributions that Social Anthropology can make. Staffing is not inherently a problem per se, but both the increasing internationalization of UK Ph.D.s and the challenges of hiring at the senior level are factors that will make a difference.

Finally, recognition, that is, the understanding of when and how Social Anthropology figures significantly in policy, practice, research, and higher education will remain a real question, especially in a research world in which inter- and transdisciplinary inquiry will become increasingly central. Anthropologists could become more comfortable in pointing to their and their colleagues' accomplishments, and specifically in highlighting the ways in which Social Anthropological perspectives and participation makes a difference. And, reciprocally, funding agencies could pursue strategies, of which this benchmarking exercise might be an instance, of recognizing and better understanding these remarkable contributions in more disciplinarily-tailored ways.

## SECTION SIX: RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, we have two sets of fairly specific recommendations, the first having to do with how best to encourage the field to play to – and support it in building upon – its singular strengths. The second set of suggestions returns to our earlier thoughts concerning both qualitative and quantitative dimensions of benchmarking.

*Stronger Postgraduate support* – Given the generally very high degree of undergraduate interest in and enthusiasm for Social Anthropology, expanding the number of quota and other awards seems critical. It is clear both that student interest is very strong and that departments are generally involving and supporting Ph.D. students in rigorous, innovative, and consequential research. Helping students make the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate work is essential, especially in an environment where employment possibilities, especially outside the academy and within the academy in different disciplines, are considerable and where disciplinary culture supports principled, intellectually well-prepared and imaginative practice. The ESRC's share of support for UK Ph.D.s in Social Anthropology has declined since the early 1990s. We strongly encourage the ESRC to expand postgraduate student support. Otherwise it could be the case that the ESRC is failing to support some of the brightest social science talent in a discipline which contributes disproportionately to the excellence of UK social science as a whole.

*Greater encouragement of imaginative and promising research proposals* - We encourage the ESRC and other funders to be willing to not only entertain but also actively to encourage imaginative and promising proposals. Small responsive grants seem particularly appropriate for catalyzing innovative research, and there is a proven track record.

*The development of funding strategies that promote multi-sited research strategies* - The ESRC should also consider larger responsive grants that might involve more investment than the usual fieldwork. The kinds of multi-sited research strategies now emerging as a crucial way of understanding complex transnational processes may well require somewhat more adventurous funding strategies; they also, however, can lead to especially significant and generalizable findings. As noted above, the future course of the field in the UK will decidedly be linked to the availability of funding appropriately attuned to the specifics of anthropological research.

*The development of a broader range of support for post-doctoral fellows* - We further strongly encourage support to enable post-docs to return to the field for further research as they turn their dissertations into monographs. More generally, a wider range of post-doctoral fellowships, some intended specifically to provide teaching opportunities and others providing time to write, would help make the transition to academic positions more feasible and also, crucially, increase the competitiveness of UK Ph.D.s for such positions.

*Improving the academic skills of practitioners* - A further funding possibility would be to help support practitioners for short residential fellowships in university departments, which could sustain the lively and consequential intellectual interface between practice and the academy.

*Better awareness of impact* - Additionally, the significant contribution made by Social Anthropology to policy and practice would be better recognised if Anthropologists became

more comfortable in pointing to their and their colleagues' accomplishments, and how Social Anthropological perspectives and participation makes a difference.

### **Methodological Dimensions of Benchmarking**

Finally, we return here briefly to the methodological questions with which we initially framed this report: how might such benchmarking reviews most comprehensively, subtly, and accurately reflect the contours of a particular discipline? We want here to highlight several qualitative criteria that emerged during our review. First, intellectual pluralism seems central to the remarkable accomplishments of the field, and we would imagine that it is also linked to creativity and innovation in other disciplines as well. Reviews should pay attention to a range of topics and methods and to the interrelationships among them, and especially to synergies in research and funding. Such variety should be approached as strength, rather than a bother to measure. Such productive pluralism can be documented if not measured in the usual sense, and it is key to Social Anthropology's success. A further qualitative criterion has to do with the ongoing and long term influence of British Social Anthropology internationally through the training of non-British students and employment and collaborative research abroad, particularly in Europe. It is clear that this is an area in which the field has long excelled, and it is critical to take these influences into appropriate account. Attending to gaps in small fields is also critical; will UK Social Anthropology lose people working on such topics because of lack of a critical mass? In terms of capacity and impact, considering the range of Masters Programs as indicators of the impact of Social Anthropological training for the professional market seems critical, as does attending to staff reports on the quality of students.

We also wanted to note that, in our view, many earlier styles in assessment were very problematic not because they were quantitative per se but because they were restrictively, reductively so. Turning to one or two numerical measures, e.g., citation indexes, as proxies for scientific and scholarly excellence is a deeply flawed approach. Taking a much wider range of more subtle, countable evidence into account, however, can help complement qualitative findings and help substantiate and refine them. In terms of research capacity, for example, such variables as the proportion of staff in the field who are considered research intensive (especially when viewed comparatively across fields) are critical. Better and more meaningful tracking of the post graduate careers of Ph.D.s well beyond their first employment could help speak to both training and impact, and the monitoring of the still relatively new 1+3 year model (and any possible successor) in terms of completion and attrition would be invaluable.

Several procedural elements of a broadly qualitative review seem crucial. First, any measures and evaluations of a discipline should be understood vis-à-vis the specific context and characteristics of that discipline. One size doesn't fit all, and the meaning of any measurement is certain to be discipline-specific. Second, proxies can be mischievous; letting one variable stand for an entire universe often leads to real misunderstanding. And any measurable variables should be considered not only in relation to each other but also, more significantly, as complement to broader qualitative findings. Third, comparative perspectives, whether cross-nationally within the same discipline or across disciplines within the UK, are invaluable. Finally, central to the success of a large-scale qualitative review such as this is that it involves a group of colleagues in serious inquiry, reflection and conversation. This really

has been a deliberative process, one in which we have been very fortunate in our interlocutors, within the panel itself, at the ESRC, and, especially, among British Social Anthropologists. Such collaborative deliberation not only allows for but requires taking time, context, disciplinary cultures, and current practice into serious and subtle account. A crucial characteristic of any qualitative review is the necessity of such shared thinking and argument, a kind of productive deliberation too easily circumvented by reliance on the reductive measures characteristic of more routine review.

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## ANNEX A

### Membership of the Steering Group for the International Benchmarking Review of UK Social Anthropology

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Professor John Gledhill (Chairman) | Chairman, Association of Social Anthropologists;<br>University of Manchester        |
| Dr Marion Berghan                  | Publisher, Berghan Publishers   |
| Professor Phil Burnham             | Chairman of the 1996 and 2001 RAE<br>Anthropology Panels; University College London |
| Dr Hilary Callan                   | Director, Royal Anthropological Institute   |
| Professor Gordon Conway            | Department for International Development  |
| Dr Kathryn Cronin                  | Barrister (practicing in family and immigration)                                    |
| Professor Ian Diamond              | Chief Executive, Economic and Social Research<br>Council                            |
| Professor Hastings Donnan          | Chairman of the 2008 RAE Anthropology Panel;<br>Queen's University Belfast          |
| Ms Lisa Hill                       | Head of Evaluation, Arts and Humanities<br>Research Council                         |
| Dr Jonathan King                   | The British Museum  |
| Professor Denise Osborn            | ESRC Research Evaluation Committee liaison<br>member (as an observer)               |
| Professor Jonathan Spencer         | University of Edinburgh   |
| Professor Dame Marilyn Strathern   | University of Cambridge   |
| Professor Brian Street             | King's College London   |
| Dr Camilla Toulmin                 | Director, International Institute for Environment<br>and Development                |

**ANNEX B****Membership of the International Benchmarking Panel**

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Professor Donald Brenneis (Chairman) | University of California at Santa Cruz,<br>USA |
| Professor John Borneman              | Princeton University, USA                      |
| Professor Veena Das                  | Johns Hopkins University, USA                  |
| Professor Jane Guyer                 | Johns Hopkins University, USA                  |
| Professor Signe Howell               | University of Oslo, Norway                     |
| Professor Sally Merry                | New York University, USA                       |
| Professor Howard Morphy              | Australian National University, Australia      |
| Professor Guillermo de la Pena       | CIESAS, Mexico                                 |

## ANNEX C

### Questionnaire distributed to Social Anthropology Departments not visited by the International Panel

*The following questionnaire was sent to all UK Social Anthropology departments that the International Panel were unable to meet during their visit.*

Name:

Address of Institution:

Department:

1. What is your particular area of expertise in anthropology?
2. Name three areas of social anthropological expertise in which you would regard the UK as being a world leader.
3. Name three areas of UK social anthropological research which you would regard as being weaker.
4. How would you rate the level of innovation in current UK social anthropological research? (Excellent, Good, Satisfactory or Poor)

Please give reasons for your answer, giving examples where possible.

5. How effective is UK social anthropological research in making use of the opportunities provided by interdisciplinarity? (Excellent, Good, Satisfactory or Poor)

Please give reasons for your answers, using examples where possible.

6. How would you rate the contribution that UK social anthropological research makes to shaping the agenda for future international research? (Excellent, Good, Satisfactory or Poor)
7. Looking at your responses to the above questions how does the international standing of UK social anthropological research compare with the situation 10 years ago? (Much Stronger, Stronger, About the same or Worse)

Please give reasons for your answer, giving examples where possible.

8. How would you describe the potential of UK social anthropological research to further develop its international standing? (Excellent, Good or Limited)

Please give reasons for your answer, giving examples where possible.

9. Please use this space as an opportunity to add more detailed responses to your answers.

10. Do you have any other comments or suggestions that you would like to be drawn to the attention of the International Panel?

Thank you. Please return your completed questionnaire to: Mr Luke Moody, Communications and Information Directorate, Economic and Social Research Council, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon SN2 1UJ.

Or, email to [Luke.Moody@esrc.ac.uk](mailto:Luke.Moody@esrc.ac.uk)

The International Panel will receive an overview of the different comments, which will be in anonymised form.



## Questionnaire distributed to a sample of non-academic users of UK Social Anthropology research

*The following questionnaire was sent to a sample of non-academic users of Social Anthropology research that were identified by members of the Steering Group.*

Dear Research User,

The Economic and Social Research Council, in partnership with the Association of Social Anthropologists, and the Royal Anthropological Institute, are organising a review to highlight the standing and contribution of UK Social Anthropology research, and identify ways of enhancing capacity and help to promote and shape future research agendas. An International Panel of leading Social Anthropologists has been appointed, and they will visit a selection of Social Anthropology University Departments in May 2006. A report will then be compiled which will analyse the discipline nationally. Part of the review will examine the success of UK Social Anthropology in terms of disseminating research to non-academic users, and its influence on policy-makers and practitioners. Your name has been suggested as a potential user of UK Social Anthropology research, and in order to inform this assessment, we would be grateful if you could complete and return this short questionnaire. All responses will remain anonymous, and not be attributable to any individual.

Please detail the name and type of organisation you work for.

1. Please indicate how you have become aware of UK Social Anthropology research.
2. Please provide specific examples of how UK Social Anthropology research has had an impact on policy and practice within your organisation.
3. How has UK Social Anthropology research benefited your organisation?
4. How do you engage with UK Social Anthropology Research (e.g through reading journals, networking with researchers, attendance at conferences, briefings and reports prepared by researchers?)
5. Could more be done to disseminate UK Social Anthropology research findings?  
 Yes/No (please delete)  
 If so how?
6. If you have contact with International Social Anthropology research, how do you feel UK Social Anthropology research compares (please explain your answer)?
7. If you have any contact with research from other disciplines, how does UK Social Anthropology compare, both in terms of quality/usefulness and dissemination?

Thank you. Please return your completed questionnaire to: Mr Luke Moody, Communications and Information Directorate, Economic and Social Research Council, Polaris House, North Star Avenue, Swindon SN2 1UJ. Or, email to [Luke.Moody@esrc.ac.uk](mailto:Luke.Moody@esrc.ac.uk).

The Economic and Social Research Council is the UK's leading research and training agency addressing economic and social concerns. We aim to provide high-quality research on issues of importance to business, the public services government. The issues considered include economic competitiveness, the effectiveness of public services and policy, and our quality of life.

The ESRC is an independent organisation, established by Royal Charter in 1965, and funded mainly by the Government.

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The Association of Social Anthropologists was founded in 1946 to promote the study and teaching of social anthropology, to present the interests of social anthropology and to maintain its professional status. Its aim is to assist in any way possible in planning research, to collate and publish information on social anthropology and to function as a register of social anthropologists.

Website: [www.theasa.org](http://www.theasa.org)

The Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland (RAI) is the world's longest-established scholarly association dedicated to the furtherance of anthropology (the study of humankind) in its broadest and most inclusive sense.

Website: [www.therai.org.uk](http://www.therai.org.uk)