



Engaged Humanities at Royal Holloway, University of London

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Foreword: The Importance of the Engaged Humanities



The School of Humanities at Royal Holloway, University of London, is a dynamic, outward facing community of staff and students committed to making a difference in the world. The 'Engaged Humanities' strategic direction we have set ourselves speaks to our determination to continue to demonstrate the vital role the Humanities play in making sense of our complicated modern world and the challenges it faces. Whether the challenge is building a more inclusive, equal society; enabling greater access to and wider engagement with the arts and heritage; or charting the human course in our increasingly digital futures, the skills we help our students develop, and the experiences they gain, through our innovative teaching and our interdisciplinary research have a key role to play.

This determination and strategic direction not only chime with both the sector-leading efforts of the British Academy and its [SHAPE initiative](#) and the post-war tradition of the public intellectual, they also speak to our history as a university. Royal Holloway was founded as a progressive institution, designed to address a social injustice and challenge of its time, namely the barriers to women's access to Higher Education. Even at the moment of its foundation, on the advice of such pioneering women activists as Millicent Fawcett, Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, and Emily Davies, Royal Holloway was charged to focus its studies on those subjects 'which have proven to be the most valuable in modern times' (Deed of Foundation). The 'Engaged Humanities' can therefore also be seen as a continuation of our Founder's mission to examine and find solutions to the challenges of our times and to make a positive contribution to society.

To bring this mission and the value of the Humanities in addressing contemporary challenges into focus we are proposing to establish an 'Engaged Humanities Lab'. This will not be a physical lab in the traditional sense but an intellectual space and supporting infrastructure for engagement that further develops our strengths in collaborative, interdisciplinary research and teaching, building capacity for more, and increasingly ambitious, challenge-led and external facing projects in the future. As the government's *R&D People and Culture Strategy* makes clear, we need to 'break down the barriers between research and innovation and wider society' and bring about 'a fundamental transformation in which researchers, policymakers and the public view research and innovation as a collective endeavour of the whole of society'¹. The Engaged Humanities Lab will be a vital space for catalysing and conducting such collaborative activity, working to co-produce transformative research and knowledge exchange with a diverse range of publics for the benefit of not just our institutional research culture and reputation, but also wider society both within the UK and internationally.

Professor Giuliana Pieri

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¹ UK Government. 2021. *R&D People and Culture Strategy: People at the Heart of R&D*. Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, p.28. Online: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1004685/r_d-people-culture-strategy.pdf

Introduction

This working paper provides an overview of the concept of the Engaged Humanities as well as an outline of the recent Engaged Humanities Day at Royal Holloway. It also maps the role and purpose of a planned Engaged Humanities Lab and considers its interaction with the priorities of the [School of Humanities Strategy](#), the college's [3-Year Strategic Plan](#), and wider R&D strategies set out by the UK Government.

To launch the School of Humanities strategic focus on Engaged Humanities, an Engaged Humanities Day was hosted virtually on Friday 7th May 2021. The event was introduced by Professor Giuliana Pieri, Head of School, and Professor James Knowles, Senior Vice Principal (Education), and opened with a [keynote address](#) from Professor Julia Black, incoming president of the British Academy, who outlined the academy's SHAPE initiative ([Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy](#)). The keynote was followed by a session entitled 'Humanities Labs: Histories and Futures'. As part of this session, talks were delivered by Dr Urszula Pawlicka-Deger (KCL), editor of the forthcoming volume *Digital Humanities and Laboratories: Perspectives on Knowledge, Infrastructure and Culture*; Professor Tim Hitchcock and Dr Sharon Webb, co-founder and Director, respectively, of the University of Sussex Humanities Lab; Dr Catriona Cooper, Senior Fellow in History, Heritage and Media at Royal Holloway; and Dr Kaja Marczevska, Research Manager at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

These sessions were then followed by a workshop involving academics from the School of Humanities, School of Performing and Digital Arts, and the School of Life Sciences and the Environment to discuss what an Engaged Humanities Lab at Royal Holloway might look like, what its remit should be, and how it could fit into the broader College landscape. Participants also discussed how staff could engage with the Lab, possible barriers to such engagement, and how these could be mitigated. The notes from this workshop can be found in Appendix D of this paper.

The Engaged Humanities Day enabled colleagues from across the university to learn more about sector wide debates on the role of humanities research in public discourse, community engagement, and the challenge-led research agenda; to explore the challenges and opportunities with which an Engaged Humanities Lab might intersect and address; and to hear from colleagues with direct experience of working with humanities labs.

This working paper brings together the debates and discussions from the Engaged Humanities Day whilst also providing an overview of the wider intellectual and policy context from which the concept of the Engaged Humanities Lab emerges. The first part of this paper will provide a brief outline of how the Engaged Humanities might be seen as a more precise and focused term than the more widely used Public Humanities. This is then followed by a short exploration of how humanities labs have proliferated and diversified, an examination of the potential role of an Engaged Humanities Lab at Royal Holloway, and an outline of the planned next steps. The paper also includes a series of appendices which record recent activities, ideas and discussions focused on the Engaged Humanities.

The Context

For Royal Holloway to effectively articulate its contribution to the Engaged Humanities there first needs to be an appreciation of the recent contexts from which the terms 'engaged' and 'public' humanities emerge. Alongside this, it is helpful to examine how humanities labs - which are most prominently associated with digital humanities infrastructures - may provide a springboard from which engaged or public humanities initiatives can be launched.

'Public' vs 'Engaged' Humanities

The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement defines university public engagement as 'the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public', noting that 'engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit'². Within the humanities, the sharing of research activities and findings outside the academy is often called 'public' or 'engaged' humanities, yet the two terms have subtle but important differences which are worth, briefly, exploring as they will help to inform any planned interventions by Royal Holloway within this disciplinary terrain.

Engaged humanities differs from public humanities in the scope and purpose of its interaction with those outside the academy. Engaged humanities can be seen as aligning more closely with what Stanton defines as 'engaged research' whereby projects 'have an intentional public purpose and direct or indirect benefit to a community [...] a public purpose beyond developing new knowledge for its own sake'³. This definition is furthered by Jay who emphasises how co-creation is essential to engaged humanities projects which see 'university and community partners share in the design, execution, and analysis of intellectual projects that have real-life impact'⁴.

Public humanities, by contrast, is generally, though not exclusively, characterised in broader terms as being activities which publicise or communicate academic knowledge to wider publics in order to inform, educate and inspire. As demonstrated by Wickman's (2016) survey of researchers involved in the public humanities, there is a strong demarcation between what is perceived as exclusively academic endeavours and activities that might constitute public humanities work: 'three out of four respondents "strongly" agreed that organizing a public festival qualifies as public humanities, and less than ten per cent think that publishing in academic venues so qualifies'⁵. The public humanities may therefore be seen to align more closely with wider definitions of public engagement, which does not necessarily require early involvement with non-academic audiences or partners in research design and collaboration.

² National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement. Website: <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/about-engagement/what-public-engagement> (accessed 22/07/2021).

³ Timothy K. Stanton. 2008. 'New Times Demand New Scholarship: Opportunities and Challenges for Civic Engagement at Research Universities'. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 3.1 19–42 (p. 24). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197907086716>

⁴ Gregory Jay. 2010. 'The Engaged Humanities: Principles and Practices for Public Scholarship and Teaching'. *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, 3.1, 51–63 (p. 55). Online: <http://ices.ua.edu/the-engaged-humanities-principles-and-practices-for-public-scholarship-and-teaching/>

⁵ Matthew Wickman. 2016. What are the Public Humanities? No, Really, What Are They? *University of Toronto Quarterly*. 85(4), 6-11 (p.8). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3138/utq.85.4.6>

Most HEIs have long established mechanisms for the public communication of research, but the emerging higher education policy context – with the triumvirate of the REF, TEF and KEF as well as research funding being driven by challenge-led and multi-partner projects – requires institutions to think about the infrastructures, cultures and strategies that are needed to create and sustain relationships with a diverse range of partners inside and outside of academia. What the Engaged Humanities Day explored was the prospect of a humanities lab as the appropriate infrastructure for the incubation of such relationships and projects, whilst also being a space for the exploration of new research methodologies and the development of skills in external engagement, multidisciplinary research, and wide-ranging approaches to knowledge exchange.

Humanities Labs

There exists a long history of 'labs' within the humanities, which is expertly sketched out by Pawlicka-Deger⁶, whilst Kohler⁷ has built upon earlier studies by Latour, Hannaway and others to examine the socio-political function of labs within the twentieth and twenty-first century university. It is not within the scope of this paper to chart these histories, but it is important to establish an awareness of the role of humanities labs across a range of institutions and consider their function and purpose.

Pawlicka-Deger notes that between 1983 and 2010 just 54 humanities labs were established globally, yet between 2010 and 2018 156 labs were created⁸. This explosion in humanities labs aligns with the rise of digital humanities and the associated infrastructural needs of the discipline, whilst Hassan⁹ also recognises this period as one where 'social labs' begin to proliferate as mechanisms for tackling grand societal challenges. This period, following the global financial crisis of 2007-08, also saw the humanities come under external pressure from governments and funders, with labs becoming a useful vehicle for interactions with the 'innovation' economy, notably the creative industries.

The proliferation of humanities labs and the perceived influence of external market forces in driving this trend have been met with scepticism in some quarters. As Pawlicka explains in an earlier article, humanities labs may be associated with the contested 'scientification' of the humanities¹⁰. Furthermore, Beck and Bishop argue that the co-opting of innovation and creativity within neoliberal discourse potentially strips twenty-first century labs of any radical energy: 'Indeed, the virtues of innovation, creativity, adaptability, and collaboration are so widely promoted in the twenty-first century that they no longer refer to the capabilities of scientific or artistic elites but serve as the guiding imperatives of everyday social and economic life under neoliberal capital'¹¹. These concerns are important to keep in mind when attempting to design a lab within the humanities, but it is also crucial to note the operational usefulness of labs as a space to foster research collaborations, transparent and supportive

⁶ Urszula Pawlicka-Deger. 2020. The Laboratory Turn: Exploring Discourses, Landscapes, and Models of Humanities Labs. *Digital Humanities Quarterly*. 14 (3). Online: <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/14/3/000466/000466.html>

⁷ Robert E. Kohler. 2008. Lab History: Reflections. *Isis*. 99(4), 761-768. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/595769>

⁸ Urszula Pawlicka-Deger. 2019. Mapping a History of Humanities and Media Labs. Presentation. Global Digital Humanities Symposium, 21st March. Online: https://pawlickadeger.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Pawlicka-Deger_Mapping_Humanities_and_Media_Labs.pdf

⁹ Zaid Hassan. 2014. *The Social Labs Revolution: A New Approach to Solving our Most Complex Challenges*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

¹⁰ Urszula Pawlicka. 2017. Data, Collaboration, Laboratory: Bringing Concepts from Science into Humanities Practice. *English Studies*. 98(5), 526–41. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013838X.2017.1332022>

¹¹ John Beck and Ryan Bishop. 2018. The Return of the Art and Technology Lab. *Cultural Politics*. 14 (2), 225–243 (p. 228). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-6609102>

research cultures, external partnerships, pilot projects, early career development and methodological experimentation. This is illustrated in the diversity of work undertaken in the numerous humanities labs found globally, a small selection of which are introduced below.

Examples

In the [Sussex Humanities Lab \(SHL\)](#), links between departments and interdisciplinarity are key to its operation. Librarians, for example, are a key constituency in the Lab's work. They are identified as 'Core Associates' and advise academic colleagues on archiving policy, digital preservation, data management, data ethics, and facilitating open access opportunities. One recent project produced by the SHL was 'Automation Anxiety' – an enquiry into contemporary cultural anxiety about rising automation in society. This project established an extensive, interdisciplinary, and multi-institution network which looked at solutions within the humanities to understand automation anxiety, reflect upon digital schools and public culture, and consider how this might impact computational decision-making. The project culminated in three workshops, at which colleagues participated in round tables on themes such as 'Automation and Work', 'Military-Industrial (In)Security', and 'The Attentiveness of Machines'.



Image of the Sussex Humanities Lab. On display is 'Artiface' by Alex Yousif (2018).
© Sussex Humanities Lab.

[The Stanford Humanities Lab](#) operated as a research and development collaboration across the arts and humanities. Their agenda was distinctly 'transdisciplinary' as they sought to support and coordinate projects which linked the humanities, arts, science and technology; 'regenerate' archives for contemporary concerns; build bridges across disciplines to answer big human questions; and enable collaboration. In the Lab's 'Wheel of Life' project, for example, researchers collaborated with a local museum to develop a programme and digital resource exploring Buddhist beliefs in relation to the modern world.

Humanities labs need not be restricted to digital projects. Interdisciplinary collaboration is the anchor of many lab initiatives in the humanities. At Duke University, the [John Hope Franklin](#)

[Humanities Institute](#) contains multiple 'humanities labs' linked to a wide range of research projects. Their aim is to provide 'faculty-led interdisciplinary ventures organized around a central theme.' Both formal and informal collaboration is encouraged as new research methods, theories, and ideas are shared amongst participants. One of the Institute's current labs examines the lives and afterlives of slavery and emancipation linking Duke University with the Global South. The associated project, 'From Slavery to Freedom', investigates the ramifications of slavery in the present legislative and wider cultural climate. A range of conferences and courses which integrate humanities disciplines have been the culmination of their work thus far. This has included a photographic exhibition on Harriet Tubman, a conference on 'Black Women Writers at Work' in September 2019, and a month-long course in the African language, Yoruba, in spring 2019.

At the University of Leiden, in the Netherlands, the '[humanities lab](#)' is embedded into the curriculum. Students are invited to formally enrol in the 'Humanities Lab' during the course of their studies. This is a two-year programme which requires students to explore interdisciplinary connections between humanities and the sciences whilst tackling topical issues including 'climate change, the Internet, war and peace, colonialism, identity, or biotechnology'. Within this programme, students attend modules on the key aspects of the humanities and elective modules which address societal issues. The project culminates in a capstone project which combines individual and team research which is presented at the annual 'Capstone Conference'. In 2021, the winning group of students explored morality and immorality in the digital age.

Humanities Labs can also be trans-institutional, as exemplified in the [Humanities Action Lab](#) which operates as a coalition of universities, non-HEI organisations, and public spaces in 40 cities in the U.S. Various projects within this lab operate simultaneously, as they seek to address topical social issues through the public humanities. Recently, a cohort of students, educators and public stakeholders collaborated on a project entitled 'Climates of Inequality: Stories of Environmental Justice'. This resulted in a travelling exhibition and digital platform looking at environmental issues impacting multiple communities, identifying historical roots and strategies for improvement.

The Purpose of an Engaged Humanities Lab at Royal Holloway

With the above context in mind, we have outlined below three overarching reasons for establishing an Engaged Humanities Lab at Royal Holloway.

The Policy Terrain

The arts and humanities have come under substantial pressure in recent years, with the Office for Students recently describing arts subjects as not being a 'strategic priority'¹². Simultaneously, there has been scrutiny of the earnings of arts and humanities graduates (including a firm, evidence-based rebuttal by the British Academy of negative assumptions in this regard¹³), alongside arts and humanities disciplines occasionally being dragged into 'culture wars' narratives within the popular press. This situation exists within the wider contradictory context of the creative industries - which rely on a steady stream of arts and humanities graduates - contributing approximately £13 million to the UK economy every hour¹⁴. These issues are deeply political, and it would not be within the remit of the Engaged Humanities Lab to tackle them directly, but it will nonetheless be important for the Lab to operate as a mechanism for creating positive interactions and co-created work with a range of publics as well as demonstrating how humanities research can be valuable to external organisations beyond higher education.

The direct value of the Engaged Humanities Lab will come from its interaction with the emerging research funding and policy landscape. There has been a well documented drive from funders for more challenge-led or interdisciplinary research, which is reflected in the increasing number of cross-council calls from within UKRI's portfolio. Alongside this, the government's [Innovation Strategy](#) and the emergence of the [Knowledge Exchange Framework](#) will place greater emphasis on industrial, commercial and community partnerships. These policies are also supported by the government's [R&D People and Culture Strategy](#) which sets out objectives around building inclusive and collaborative research cultures as well as innovation in public engagement. A lab, with its broad associations with experimentation as well as practical outcomes, provides the ideal setting for arts and humanities scholars to grapple with these questions and formulate projects, partnerships and collaborations which will positively respond to these policy challenges and opportunities.

The Engaged Humanities Lab will also help to drive school and institutional policies and strategies. Developing a lab will help to realise pillar three of the [School of Humanities Strategy](#), which aims to build on the school's existing reputation for individual-led research and 'develop our identity as a pioneer of challenge-led, collaborative "engaged humanities" research, responsive to societal challenges and committed to principles of social justice, equality and diversity'. Furthermore, the lab directly responds to one of Royal Holloway's

¹² Office for Students. 2021. Consultation on Recurrent Funding for 2021-22, p. 17. Online: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/8610a7a4-0ae3-47d3-9129-f234e086c43c/consultation-on-funding-for-ay2021-22-finalforweb.pdf>

¹³ The British Academy. 2020. Qualified for the Future. Quantifying demand for arts, humanities and social science skills. Online: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/1888/Qualified-for-the-Future-Quantifying-demand-for-arts-humanities-social-science-skills.pdf>

¹⁴ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. 2020. UK Creative Industries contributes almost £13 million to the UK economy every hour. Press Release. 6th February. Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uks-creative-industries-contributes-almost-13-million-to-the-uk-economy-every-hour>

institutional [strategic priority pillars](#) which focuses on developing 'strengths in challenge-led research' and contributing 'to addressing key issues of our modern time'. The Lab will therefore be a useful tool in re-orientating research cultures within both the School of Humanities and the wider College towards collaborative, challenge-led research, teaching and civic projects and partnerships.

Not a Research Centre

Pawlicka suggests that the explosion in humanities labs from 2010 onwards may, in part, be explained by a move away from the model of the research centre within digital humanities. Pawlicka aligns this shift to a wider 'infrastructural turn' during this period in response to external drivers from funders, government and industry for more multidisciplinary and collaborative research which rapidly addressed social challenges¹⁵. The lab therefore offered a nimble infrastructural option due to its association with experimentation and problem solving. Additionally, a lab can run for a specific period of time or be the mechanism to tackle a precise challenge, problem or question.

The Engaged Humanities Lab at Royal Holloway would therefore not replace existing research centres or institutes but operate alongside these as an agile, flexible, and problem-focused infrastructure that could quickly establish humanities-led or informed responses to research and knowledge exchange challenges. It will undoubtedly call upon long-established expertise within relevant research centres but would do so to address a precise project objective. While based in the School of Humanities, the Lab would also provide a space within which academic colleagues from multiple schools and colleagues from professional services departments could converge to formulate responses to challenges or opportunities.

The nimble and flexible nature of the lab also means that its membership can shift and adapt to the challenges it sets itself to address, unlike a research centre or institute which typically requires a longer-term commitment from participating academics to be effective and has a thematic, chronological or topic focus to both its membership and activities. A lab can also more easily provide a space in which the methods of engaged, collaborative research, teaching, or other activities can be explored; new approaches and partnerships scoped; and for which training can be provided that crosses disciplinary, school and academic-professional service boundaries.

'Engaged' rather than 'Public'

As discussed earlier in this paper, the Engaged Humanities Lab would be able to move beyond simply promoting and facilitating public engagement with research to explore strategic partnerships with external stakeholders as well as the co-production of research and knowledge exchange with diverse communities beyond the academy. This will allow the Lab to align directly with Royal Holloway's 3-Year Strategic Plan and the School of Humanities' Strategy, and to identify and catalyse project ideas and emerging partnerships which can be scaled-up into potential REF Impact Case Studies and/or larger grant applications through the relevant Research Catalyst. The Engaged Humanities Lab would also complement the broader, coordinated efforts by all six school Directors of External Engagement to develop an

¹⁵ Urszula Pawlicka-Deger. 2019. Mapping a History of Humanities and Media Labs. Presentation. Global Digital Humanities Symposium, 21st March. Online: https://pawlickadeger.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Pawlicka-Deger_Mapping_Humanities_and_Media_Labs.pdf

'infrastructure of engagement' at Royal Holloway to underpin the transition toward becoming a more recognisably '[engaged university](#)' and the establishment of a Civic University Agreement.

In particular, it is envisioned that an Engaged Humanities Lab at Royal Holloway would specialise in scoping, catalysing and brokering the forms of 'engaged' humanities research, collaborative and co-created in nature, which will be crucial to the success of the challenge-led research agenda for arts and humanities disciplines. This could take the form of scoping exercises to establish how to create collaborative research partnerships with specific communities or organisations; developing training opportunities focusing on the skills, methodology and ethical considerations inherent in 'engaged' collaborative research, teaching or other activity; workshops to identify, share and develop guidance for best practice in either engaging specific publics or sectors; and strategic interventions to help develop large scale challenge-led, interdisciplinary and multi-partner bids in response to specific calls or other opportunities as they arise.

In pursuing this type of activity, the Engaged Humanities Lab will help the School of Humanities, arts and humanities researchers across the College, and Royal Holloway more broadly better align its research culture and supporting infrastructure of engagement with the UK Government's *R&D People and Culture Strategy*. This sets all UK universities the challenge of creating 'an ambitious new approach to supporting public engagement with research and innovation, through stakeholder engagement and insight gathering' and piloting 'experimental approaches to public dialogue and community-led research and innovation'¹⁶.

¹⁶ *R&D People and Culture Strategy: People at the Heart of R&D*, p. 7.

Next Steps

To realise the creation of an Engaged Humanities Lab based in the School of Humanities at Royal Holloway, the following steps will be taken:

Autumn 2021	A working group will be established including Humanities Department representatives and the Director of Royal Holloway's Humanities and Arts Research Institute (HARI) to ensure the planned activities of both the Lab and HARI dovetail and complement one another.
Spring 2022	Dr Christopher Daley and Dr Matthew Smith to deliver a paper to the School of Humanities Executive formally proposing the establishment of the Engaged Humanities Lab, setting out a suggested management and governance structure, and outlining a year one budget and programme of activity.
Spring 2022	Launch of Engaged Humanities Lab with an initial programme focused on the ways in which humanities researchers can interact with the challenge-led research environment.

The establishment of an Engaged Humanities Lab at Royal Holloway is both an exciting new venture and a reaffirmation of the university's founding ethos, to, with renewed vigour, explore how our teaching and research can address the challenges of our times, have a positive impact upon society, and make a difference to individuals, communities, and businesses both in the UK and beyond.

About the Authors



Dr Christopher Daley

**RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER**

Dr Christopher Daley has over ten years' experience working in both academic and professional services positions within higher education. He holds a PhD in English Literature from the University of Westminster and originally worked as a Visiting Lecturer before moving into research support roles, initially within scholarly communications and more recently in posts focused on research development and research strategy. He also holds voluntary roles within the Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA) as a Special Interest Group Chair for Research into Research Management as well as being the ARMA representative for the Research Administration as a Profession (RAAAP) longitudinal study.



Dr Matthew Smith

**SENIOR LECTURER
IN PUBLIC HUMANITIES**

Dr Matthew Smith is a Senior Lecturer in Public Humanities and Director of External Engagement in the School of Humanities at Royal Holloway, University of London. His research, teaching and professional practice interests include democratic heritage and the history of rights and representation, digital storytelling and public engagement, public history, and museum studies.



Angela Platt

Engaged Humanities Officer

Angela Platt is an Engaged Humanities Officer at Royal Holloway working within the School of Humanities, where she also teaches as a History Tutor and is completing her PhD on the religious history of love. She is also currently an Associate Lecturer in the Humanities at St Mary's University, and is involved in public engagement at Ibstock Place School, The Ecclesiastical History Society, and The Brilliant Club.



Charlotte Gauthier

Engaged Humanities Officer

Charlotte Gauthier is a doctoral researcher at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her thesis, 'Crusading on the Eve of the Reformation: The Making of Church, State, and Society in Late-Medieval England' explores the social, political, and ecclesiastical history of 15th- and 16th-century English crusading. Her other academic interests include digital humanities, the use of history in modern conflict, and public humanities engagement.

Appendix A

Initial scoping proposal delivered to School of Humanities Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee, January 2021.

Scoping Project – Engaged Humanities Lab

This short project will investigate whether there is the intellectual desire and logistical possibility of forming a humanities 'lab' at Royal Holloway. The term lab is used in this context not to replicate the idea of a physical scientific laboratory, but as a concept that Pawlicka-Deger (2020) recently described as the 'infrastructure of engagement', or more broadly conceived, as part of what Hassan (2014) has identified as 'social labs.' Such a lab would therefore operate as a space in which humanities scholars can experiment and prototype collaborative activities such as: challenge-led research, interdisciplinary idea formation, digital humanities methodologies, and 'engaged' humanities interventions into public discourse. The lab would be an iterative space where researchers could test and appraise the possibility for humanities-led or informed approaches to complex social challenges, building links across disciplinary boundaries and beyond the academy.

This project will involve the hosting of a one-day scoping symposium at Royal Holloway, led by the department of Research and Innovation and School of Humanities. The symposium will include talks by scholars who have explored the laboratory concept in the humanities and will be followed by an afternoon of activities and workshops which will attempt to map out how a humanities lab might function at Royal Holloway. The findings from the day will be collated into a report which will be disseminated within 3 months of the event.

Dr Christopher Daley (18/01/2021)

References

Hassan, Z., 2014. *The Social Labs Revolution: A New Approach to Solving our Most Complex Challenges*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Pawlicka-Deger, U., 2020. A Laboratory as the Infrastructure of Engagement: Epistemological Reflections. *Open Library of Humanities*, 6(2), p.24. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/olh.569>

Appendix B

Programme for the Engaged Humanities Day, Friday 7th May 2021.

Engaged Humanities Day, 7th May 2021 – Programme

Event One

9.30am - 10.45am Engaged Humanities and the British Academy SHAPE Initiative

Keynote talk by Professor Julia Black (incoming President of the British Academy) on SHAPE and the role of the arts, humanities and social sciences in the post-COVID world. Followed by Q&A.

10.45am - 11.30am - Break

Event Two

11.30am - 1.00pm Humanities Labs: Histories and Futures

Session examining the historical role of labs within the humanities and their future purpose.

Speakers:

- Professor Tim Hitchcock (Professor of Digital History, University of Sussex)
- Sussex Humanities Lab - presentation on the future plans for the lab
- Dr Urszula Pawlicka-Deger (Marie Curie Research Fellow, King's Digital Lab, King's College London)
- Dr Catriona Cooper (Senior Fellow, History, Heritage and Media, Royal Holloway)

Appendix C

Schedule for the Engaged Humanities Lab Workshop held on Friday 7th May 2021.

Engaged Humanities Lab Workshop – Royal Holloway, University of London

Friday 7th May, 2.00pm – 4.00pm. Virtual meeting on MS Teams.

Context

As part of the School of Humanities' focus on 'engaged' humanities, we are currently scoping the idea of establishing an Engaged Humanities Lab. The purpose of both the Engaged Humanities Day and this workshop is to investigate whether there is the intellectual desire and logistical possibility of forming this kind of 'lab' within the college.

What do we mean by an Engaged Humanities Lab?

Initial concept: The term lab is used in this context not to replicate the idea of a physical scientific laboratory, but as a concept that Pawlicka-Deger (2020) recently described as the 'infrastructure of engagement', or more broadly conceived, as part of what Hassan (2014) has identified as 'social labs.' Such a lab would therefore operate as a space in which humanities scholars can experiment and prototype collaborative activities such as: challenge-led research, interdisciplinary idea formation, digital humanities methodologies, and 'engaged'/public humanities interventions into contemporary discourse. The lab would be an iterative space where researchers could test and appraise the possibility for humanities-led or informed approaches to complex social challenges, building links across disciplinary boundaries and beyond the academy.

Purpose of the workshop

We have gathered together all members of the Research Committee from the School of Humanities as well as representatives from the School of Performing and Digital Arts, Department of Geography, Centre for the GeoHumanities and Humanities and Arts Research Institute (HARI) to form initial responses to the following questions:

1. What should be the remit of an Engaged Humanities Lab?
2. Where should it sit in relation to existing centres and institutes?
3. What forms of 'infrastructure' should be created to support the lab?
4. How will success be measured?

Outcomes

We are very fortunate to have two Engaged Humanities Officers – Angela Platt and Charlotte Gauthier – on hand to take detailed notes so we have a clear record of the discussion and recommendations. This will help to inform a short report provisionally titled *Scoping an Engaged Humanities Lab at Royal Holloway*, which will be distributed by early autumn 2021.

Schedule for Workshop

2.00pm	Introduction: Christopher Daley and Matthew Smith
2.05pm	Professor Harriet Hawkins will talk about the Centre for the GeoHumanities and some wider reflections on humanities labs. Followed by initial group discussion.
2.30pm	Breakout session one. Answering the following questions in smaller groups: 1. What should be the remit of an Engaged Humanities Lab? 2. Where should it sit in relation to existing centres and institutes?
2.50pm	Reports from individual groups
3.10pm	Breakout session two. Answering the following questions in smaller groups: 1. What forms of 'infrastructure' should be created to support the lab? 2. How will success be measured?
3.30pm	Reports from individual groups
4.00pm	Close

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Appendix D

Notes from the Engaged Humanities Lab Workshop.

Session 1 Summary -

The 'remit' of the EH Lab mainly centred upon the desire that this new 'Lab' would be something which would nurture those who participated, and which was rooted in Humanities (rather than providing an 'add-on' as discussed by Harriet Hawkins in the opening presentation).

Discussion about the ramifications for being a 'digital' enterprise were also discussed – since labelling the lab as 'digital' would include expectations for resources, finances, and tools. While being 'digital' is vogue, it's important to seriously consider whether this this will be a cardinal trait of this initiative.

Further to this, members advocated that the main resource in this work should be the 'human resources'. Staff bring various skills, which they've acquired both within their studies and beyond, and these should be harnessed. This 'knowledge sharing' should transpire in such a way that the skilled staff member does not simply become the 'go-to' person, but instead has space to share their knowledge and skills with other Humanities academics.

Important to also keep in mind that the 'human resource' element in this may require a 'buy-out' – there will always be a cost, even if it's not explicitly financial (discussed more in the second session).

Discussion about how the Lab would function raised thoughts about it being as inclusive as possible – it should not be bound to specific themes, but should facilitate an open space for academics in all stages and arenas to openly share knowledge and learn.

Session 2 Summary -

The key discussion in this session on infrastructure and measuring success was a useful sequel to what was largely covered in the first session. Members of the group were very keen that the 'human resource' be considered – since staff already have heavy workloads – how would staff be able to allot the necessary time to contribute to this Lab?

Some suggested that week-long 'intensives' might be preferable over holding events which run fortnightly. Alternatively, a week of 'Engaged Humanities' activities should, perhaps, be assimilated into the workload of all staff – so they all can expect to be able to make time to participate in these events.

Measuring the 'success' of such an enterprise according to KPIs or otherwise was not viewed favourably by many in the group.

NOTES:

Small group work #1

Q1: What should be the remit of an Engaged Humanities Lab?

- What we need is a 'green house' – something nurturing and makes good things grow.
 - Links into making good things grow from humanities soil.
 - Humanities should be integral from the start rather than an add-on or final service. Opportunities for cross-pollination and disciplinary work.
 - A problem with 'lab' is the perceived technological drive ... technology was heavily at the heart of a lot of scientific 'labs' but it's not necessarily what we need at RHUL.
- Identifying barriers to growth – a lab should sweep away those barriers. A strictly technological route can shape the types of activity you might be doing.
- We wouldn't get a buy-in from humanities staff if we try to pursue a 'technological' model.
- Thinking about financial side of things
 - If we were to think about humanities digital lab, the finances would be huge.
 - Potential lack of understanding as to what it takes to start and sustain a real digital drive.
 - RHUL isn't a digitally-savvy brand. Need to think carefully – if we want a 'digital humanities lab' we might struggle.
- Nurturing should be the key – opening up opportunities to staff and students.
 - Staff bring varying skills – and this knowledge needs to be shared.
 - How does this knowledge get shared beyond the person simply being a 'point person'.
 - The Lab needs to become a space for learning and experimentation.
- Thinking about the 'lab' language.
 - Need to speak the language of those with whom you are engaging. Many of them are not within the humanities framework.
 - By using the word 'lab' it might help them to understand what we are trying to accomplish? Lab might be useful shorthand even if it's not a 'traditional lab'.
- What is the purpose of this 'Lab'?
 - To nurture the entire community?
 - Is it a closed community which allows entry with 'hallowed status'?
 - How do we create it in such a way, with underlying structures that perform the functions we need, rather than hegemonic structures.
- Need an 'accessible hook' Lab might be useful language in this sense.
- College likes 'Digital' but do we have the required digital infrastructure.
- Research can often be atomized, a lab might help overcome this.
- Will this lab have thematic focuses?
 - Is it a general Lab with general ways of engagement?
- Themes might provide a framework, but that shouldn't limit things.
 - What are the local, regional and international challenges?
 - Different ways we can approach these – do we need to identify challenges first or start by thinking of nuts & bolts required for nurturing which will enable us to respond to challenges.

- We might build up capacity to address challenges rather than start with the challenges.
- One of the catalysts was conceived very broadly – looking at ways in which digital might interact with humanities and arts.
 - It has now become narrowly focused – excluding a lot of people within the school.
- Issue of training: using a lab space to do training, linking to technique
 - Library and Archives: some spaces in the Library if you take services out of them, you could put something like this into it.
 - As a school, not clear which is more important: digital training, getting people all together, raising big grants?
 - Big grants and funding and also bring in equipment and can support project staff (if something more akin to the Sussex model was desired).
 - Science Depts will assume that there will be staff support – which must not be understated.
 - It is a mistake to pitch a lab around the equipment.
- Resources – this will need resources put into.
 - Are people giving up their own research to do this? Buy out needs to come from somewhere.

Q2: Where should it sit in relation to existing centers and institutes? How would it function?

A lab should be a space for learning & teaching – it's not quite the same as an institute or a centre.

- Concern embedded within the question – it's neither a centre nor an institute and it needs to be doing something different.
- This could potentially become a poorer sister to the catalysts
- How do we ensure this is viewed as a valuable enterprise?
- How does it relate to the catalysts, not just existing centres and institutes?
- Relationships between centres and institutes – as members of different centres and institutes it's already somewhat difficult to navigate
- Big challenge: to work across the university rather than be restricted by the structures endemic within your 'centres' or 'institutes'.

Lab should be feeding into all of the centres

- Thinking about the focus on training and methodologies: it should be encouraging everyone to rethink their own strategies and processes.

If we have this kind of lab, we don't want it to be exclusive.

- Lab needs to work for everybody.
- Working with the centres and the institutes, within humanities and cognate schools is needed.

The Lab casts its net over the institutes and centres as a 'web'.

- In a practical way: is it possible to ensure every centre & institute in the humanities has an ambassador – someone who is brought into the ‘lab’ from the start through these conversations to ensure there is a trickle down.

It’s more of a network than a centre

- Thinking about the humanities as a centre.
- How do you reconcile ‘doing something for the school’ which is important but there are scholars who are not just ‘badging’ their work, they are Humanities scholars – a fantastic resource in themselves.

We need to justify our existence, but on the other hand there is an intellectual reach across the college which is very important.

- If we could we the catalyst for Humanities scholarship which happens across the college, the lab could be an interesting collaborative place.
- Lab – doesn’t have a specific theme attached to it. Themes and means of conceptualizing ideologies can change.
- Think about pulling together small pockets of funding to do something more meaningful as a collaborative effort.

Entire group:

- Key: important of resource – we need something behind it.
- This shouldn’t be conceived of as physical space or equipment.
- Large grants can draw in some kit, but what we really need is time to have those conversations.
- There will need to be some kind of buy-out for substantial staff engagement.
- The Lab has an important role in nurturing and developing research activities, ideas, and researchers themselves.
- Expertise across the school – we need to utilize this. Prevent expertise from being locked in individuals.
- Research training would be a useful way of making the case for this lab – whilst PhD students are trained, staff need to have access to training opportunities more generally as well. Career development for staff (not just students).
- Language – broad support for the term Humanities and proactively promoting Humanities.
- The term ‘Engaged Humanities’ – colleagues felt this does speak to what we are trying to do.
- The provocation from Kaja was appreciated (from session 2) re: labs – it’s not an institute, it’s used in different creative ways and important thoughts about inclusivity were raised.
- If a project is too open – it can become too loose. We need to clarify ideas that people can sink teeth into.
- Projects might also be self-selecting, meaning certain things for certain people.
- Prefer not to have ‘target-driven’ language all the time.
- Staff training is a superb idea and would be much appreciated.
- We want to look after PhD students but also need to look after staff whose careers are complex.

- It's difficult to sustain a career in the difficult academic environment.

Small Group #2

Q1: What forms of infrastructure should be created to support the lab? (with an eye on lack of money)

Feeling of concern and trepidation - time resource AND financial resource.

- There needs to be space in terms of academic working week and calendars.
- Would want to see how people in the lab hold 'positions' in the lab
- Members of staff need to have some kind of 'base' in the lab which gives them time resource in their working week to do stuff within the lab.
- We are working in an environment where time is very precious – there is no time in our working week.
- Infrastructure needs to consider time as well as finances.
- Would there be a way in which HARI money might be redirected so it's not small pots but a larger pot to fundamentally allow for activities of the lab to occur?

The lab model might invite itself for intensives

- Instead of trying to have several little events, you have a week long 'intensive' event.
- We manage our time according to things we really find interesting – where time is hard is when we have lots of different demands in a week leaving us too fragmented.
- A laboratory could mean smaller workshops, but it might be more suited to intensive periods of working together.

Echo the idea of something intensive – a good idea.

- How do we maximise our time?
- If we put aside a week per year with intensive events and say 'no emails' within the school.

Everyone in the school will have a week of events built into their workload?

- Strong signal that this is taken seriously.

Would worry about this being compulsory – sceptics, cynics, etc.

- If people really want to do it – they will quite enjoy doing it.
- If you can get momentum going around intellectual curiosity – people will join.

Needs to be real emphasis on practicalities of learning

- What are you doing with this?
- How will you embed this in your research in the future?

Q2: How would we measure success? Do we need KPIs?

This should be distinct from catalysts – it should bring in people from different sectors and disciplines.

- If everything is tied to targets and KPIs – where do we get the intellectual newness of what we do? It needs to be something collaboratively new.

Entire group:

- Don't want to measure success at the moment.
- Think of this as something which sits outside KPIs, etc.
- Discussion of a week-long intensive workshop, facilitated with externals, artists in residence, etc.
- Conversation about finances and time – perhaps pool finances for a big project.
- Resourcing – human resource to do this. It's not about space and kit – instead, this is about human resource.
- Time and bandwidth is really important.
- We still need a 'central resource' to make this go forward (who is managing and administering activity) – though the kernel of this is in Matthew's role and the EHOs.
- We can measure success by how many academics engage with this – but we need to give staff the bandwidth to engage with this.
- Need to be thinking not just about academics but PGRs and Post-docs too.
- This isn't just a RHUL problem – partners also need time to do these things (they need notice, lead time, etc). If we can pay for some of their time, also useful.
- A week of intense activities is probably preferred over drip drip of events every fortnight. This allows academics to be more invested.

Appendix E

Hidden REF certificate for Engaged Humanities Day

[The Hidden REF](#) is 'a competition that recognises all research outputs and every roles that makes research possible'. We submitted the Engaged Humanities Day to the 'Community Building' category and it was assessed by the 'Contexts' panel. Whilst we did not win a prize, all participants were provided with a certificate recognising their work. An image of this certificate can be found below.

