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Expanding Anthropology: A Narrative of Innovation in the A-level Curriculum

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Abstract
This paper narrates the successful development over the past decade of an A-level award in anthropology, presenting an "insider's" perspective on the process. Using comparison with an earlier period, the paper seeks to explain this success, concluding that support from anthropology's professional networks was crucial.

Introduction

From September 2010, teaching towards a GCE A-level qualification in anthropology began across twenty centres in England. This represented the culmination of efforts to secure a place for the discipline in the "mainstream" examination curriculum of sixth forms and colleges, a process whose origins can be traced to the nineteen-sixties[i]. For its protagonists, the satisfaction that accompanied this expansion *into* the pre-university curriculum was tempered inevitably by a recognition that an equal effort must now be expended in sustaining and expanding this presence *within* an examination system that remains the primary matriculation route to Higher Education[ii].

To bring about curriculum change requires the active engagement of enthusiasts; it may imply too the existence of (at least) a *latent* demand from students. However, no explanation can ignore the need for curriculum innovation to accord with broader institutional and disciplinary priorities.

This paper is written by a member of the Royal Anthropological Institute's (RAI) current Education Committee and therefore an active participant in the A-level project. I shall draw on this experience to argue that the agency of this committee has driven the A-level project but was not a sufficient condition for its successful outcome. Recognising the vulnerability of their discipline to changes affecting higher education, anthropologists crucially have lent their collective support to the expansion of anthropology into the pre-university curriculum.

This was not the experience of an earlier generation of enthusiasts, able only to aspire after an A-level anthropology. My narrative begins in that period when "anthropology did not expand into other educational settings because anthropologists themselves did not want to expand" (Spencer 2000:5).

"Popularisation while Maintaining Academic Standards" (1964 – 1985)

The Robbins Report on the future of UK higher education (1963) ushered in a decade of expansion from which academic anthropology, to an extent, benefited. A lean period for higher education funding followed, hitting the social sciences in particular and halting this expansion (Spencer 2000; Mills 2003).

Intellectually, "British social anthropology" (Kuper 1996:176) was particularly vulnerable to new assaults on "its empirical focus and theoretical emphases" (Spencer 2000: 3). On the other hand, it was possible to read the period as "a brave new world" of intellectual innovation displaying "the kind of intellectual optimism that academics usually only manage in a period of apparently unlimited expansion" (pp.12-13).

Institutional and intellectual flux provides a backdrop for the first attempts to introduce an A level in anthropology by the discipline's two scholarly associations, the professional Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) and later the Royal Anthropological Institute.

David Mills has provided a description of the defining 1964 ASA conference on "The Place of Anthropology in General Education" to which schoolteachers were admitted for the open sessions: "One of the key subtexts to the gathering was whether sociology and social anthropology should be taught as A-level subjects" (2010:168). Conference convenor Paul Stirling was unable to "sit by and see schools teach a sociology in which social anthropology is scarcely represented" (p. 167). Support for an A-level was countered with strong opposition from others although "some of the opposition agreed that it was better to bow to the inevitable and cooperate" (p. 168). A "Committee on Anthropology in General Education" to coordinate outreach activities in schools was established under Stirling with a membership drawn from the ASA executive and representatives of university departments. A key unifying principle was the need to maintain anthropology's disciplinary integrity – "the more interest we take ourselves, the less will it be left to non-anthropological amateurs to lead each other into the ditch" (p. 169). However, a single attempt (1968-1970) to introduce an A-level in cooperation with the Sociology Teachers Section of the British Sociological Association failed to interest a GCE examinations board in the proposed syllabus.

The baton for promoting anthropology in schools and colleges passed from the ASA to the RAI in the early 1970s. In December 1974, the Institute's newly-established Education Committee held its first meeting and an early decision was the recruitment of a full-time Educational Development Officer. However, the focus was firmly on meeting "the growing demand" within the lower secondary age group "for teaching resources among teachers of Social Studies, Geography and many other subjects" (RAIN 1975: 3) The Officer post did not survive the withdrawal of external finding beyond 1979 and there is no record of the committee meeting after January 1981.

A "house memorandum" from RAI Director Jonathan Benthall to Education Committee members noted "the time has now obviously come for some policy decisions to be made about the committee's future work." Among the options suggested, he asked "Should we attempt to promote anthropology as a GCE subject at "O" and "A" level?" and invited members "if anybody has the time to prepare a position paper." There is no record of subsequent discussion.

A report to the RAI Council in October 1983 noted the "remobilisation" of the committee under a new chairman, John Corlett. However, the new committee chose to prioritise a policy response towards "multi-cultural education and anti-racist programmes," bringing it into potential conflict with an anthropological establishment still keen to promote an "intellectual austerity" (Leach 1974: 8) to protect both the Institute and the discipline from the opprobrium heaped on sociology for engaging in public controversy. Within two years Corlett wrote of his increasing frustration, prompting his own resignation and effectively marking the end of his committee: "I'm conscious on the one hand of the educational expertise, enthusiasm, acuity of perceptions and creative thinking among members of [the

committee], but on the other hand of the intransigence of Council, coupled with a measure of elitism, which has resulted (in [the Director's] own words) in the committee achieving very little."

For nearly two decades, the debate in anthropology's wider circles on the appropriateness of teaching the discipline in pre-university settings had been ongoing but muted and ambivalent. Leach was famously dismissive (Leach 2003). He spoke for a seniority for which even undergraduate tuition represented something of a concession (Spencer 2000: 6)! The contrast with sociology was stark. Mills has drawn a vivid portrait of strained academic rivalries during the 1960s: "sociology and anthropology increasingly developed antagonistic personalities" (2010: 109). Better capturing the *Zeitgeist*, sociology rode the boom in undergraduate social science. Within a decade, the discipline had expanded into the pre-university curriculum as well: by 1977, over 17000 students were entered annually for A-level Sociology examinations, more than 80% through the syllabus of the Associated Examining Board (Brown 1982: 110).

A majority of these students were entered through further education colleges rather than school sixth forms, probably reflecting an innate conservatism in schools and a perception in some quarters of sociology as a politically-motivated subject of dubious academic respectability. In response, sociology teachers were keen to stress the academic integrity of their discipline by differentiating between examination sociology (at GCE O- and A-levels) and the "social studies" taught to lower secondary pupils, typically factual and descriptive "in which what passed for knowledge was the exchange of conventional wisdom" (p. 111). An interesting consequence was the absence of sociology from the younger age groups upon whom social anthropology's efforts were focused at this time.

The author of a *Guide to the Teaching of Anthropology in Schools and Colleges* (Bulmer 1977) noted with some understatement: "There does not seem to be any immediate prospect for the introduction of anthropology at GCE" (p. 17) but in a section on "Strategies for Teaching" identified a variety of settings for anthropological input, including the provision of a comparative element in sociology or religious studies syllabuses or as the basis of "general" or "liberal studies" courses at pre-university level. The explicitly comparative perspective of the London Examinations Board's new A-level Sociology syllabus, first examined in 1978, provided scope for the inclusion of anthropological material.

However, the "sub-contracting of anthropology" (Parry 1982) to sociology presented a potential downside. The two disciplines were involved in an unequal relationship and anthropology was dependent on sociology for its representation: for example, "[t]he unwillingness of [sociology] writers to acknowledge the theoretical work of contemporary anthropologists in their [course] textbooks has created the impression that social anthropology is still bound by the functionalist approach" (p. 80).

Approximately 17,500 candidates sat for A-level sociology examinations in 1978. The RAI Education Officer, Michael Sallnow, suggested this removed any chance of an anthropology syllabus. It seemed that the reticence of the anthropological community had caused the discipline to miss the A-level boat. Citing intellectual convergence between the two disciplines, Sallnow now proposed an integrated A-level, a "comparative social science," "drawing on the combined strengths of the sociological and anthropological traditions but eschewing any disciplinary affiliation" (1978: 20). An emphasis on the complementarity of the two disciplines would offset "the greatest danger" (p. 19) of social anthropology and sociology being perceived as rivals at this level. Sallnow acknowledged a difficulty with his advocacy. Integration implies equality but the starting point was sociology's clear dominance within the existing pre-university examination curriculum and in the universities. Given the need for support from higher education to innovate an A-level, it was not clear how academic sociology and anthropology could break from the disciplinary demarcation practised in the universities.

Other problems existed. A-level subjects that do not carry the title of an acknowledged discipline tend to carry less respectability or may be perceived as lacking intellectual gravitas. Besides, whilst a comparative social science would have supported "later rather than earlier specialisation" (p. 20), it is

unclear how an integrated course - especially one that avoided the mistake of presenting an outmoded version of anthropology - would have allowed students to recognise the specifically anthropological elements and so move on to an informed choice of degree.

The expansion of the university sector in the decade after publication of the Robbins Report did not amount to the creation of a mass higher education system. It was still possible to view anthropology's modest increase in undergraduate numbers with a measure of equanimity. The RAI felt no need to initiate direct campaigns aimed at recruiting sixth formers, although a sixth form day course in 1977, heavily over-subscribed, suggested a more direct approach. In general terms, the RAI chose to define its strategy as "popularisation while maintaining academic standards."

The brief duration of the "remobilised" Education Committee in the 1980s, the immediacy of its concern with topical issues of racism, and its difficult relationship with a cautious "professional" anthropology, provided little scope to consider pre-university curriculum innovation. Some focus on 16+ provision was allowed by national discussion of the subject criteria that all examination boards would have to apply in constructing examination syllabuses at GCE O-level. However, the position was similar to that at A-level: whilst economics, politics and sociology each merited their own set of subject criteria, the best anthropology could hope for was the inclusion of anthropological elements into other syllabuses[iii].

"Vital to the Health of the Discipline" (1998-2011)

A second wave of expansion in the higher education sector occurred from the late 1980s, introducing a "mass" higher education system. By 2000, under-21 participation rates had risen to around one-third, from 5% in 1960 (Mayhew et al. 2004:66). "The new boom in [overall] student recruitment coincided with a moment of higher public visibility for social anthropology, and demand for places on anthropology courses has soared since the late 1980s" (Spencer 2000:4). The true picture was more complex. Mills (2003) has identified a steady decline in applications to single honours anthropology degrees over the decade to 2004 but growth in the number of joint honours and modular degrees giving access to anthropology. Some (highly-rated) departments had few difficulties in recruiting students who had actively chosen anthropology; others were becoming reliant on the clearing process to fill vacancies.

For some, anthropology was approaching the century's end with renewed intellectual confidence: "The challenge is now to establish a truly cosmopolitan social anthropology, multi-centred, engaged in a range of current intellectual debates" (Kuper 1996:193). Others surveyed instead a discipline "diversified into a jungle of theoretical perspectives... torn and fragmented" (Eriksen 2006:34). However, these contrasting perspectives drew a shared conclusion: that a viable anthropology needed an increased public presence, a greater visibility.

Anthropology failed to match (at the disciplinary level) the institutional transition from an elite to a mass system of higher education (Bennett 2010:22). The discipline's limited expansion owed much to its low profile in the public consciousness, to which its continuing absence from the pre-university curriculum contributed. As a consequence, the discipline remained vulnerable to ill-informed public perceptions of its subject matter. Previously, postgraduate research activity had been prioritised as the means to reproduce the discipline. Now attempts to improve the quality of the undergraduate experience indicated the new importance attached to recruitment and retention.

In October 1998, the National Network for Teaching and Learning Anthropology[iv] held a workshop at the University of East London (UEL). Thirty five participants drawn from the pre-university and higher education sectors met as "the Pre-University Anthropology Forum" to discuss the transition from secondary and further education to higher education. Non-university teachers of anthropology were identified as "an important mediating link with the upcoming generation of [higher education]

students" (Valentine and Sims 1999:23) and the explicit aim of the Forum was to facilitate the flow of students to university anthropology[v].

Since the 1970s, the International Baccalaureate Diploma had provided the sole opportunity to study social anthropology as an examination subject in the pre-university curriculum. However, the subject has had to compete with other humanities and social sciences as an optional choice, ensuring that candidate numbers have remained small up to the present day[vi]. A key decision of the UEL workshop was to adopt a new A-level initiative. Among the participants present at that meeting, Brian Morris argued that previous failures to follow other social sciences into the A-level curriculum disadvantaged anthropology graduates who wished to take up careers as teachers in schools and colleges, a theme that would recur and be prominent in the later and ultimately successful efforts to create an A-level anthropology qualification. A more immediate incentive to innovate was the impending "Curriculum 2000" changes to the structure of A-levels that would introduce a two-tier system of AS (Advanced Subsidiary, a stand-alone qualification) and A2 examinations, based on modular courses. A "typical" three-A-level course under the previous system would be replaced by four subjects taken to AS-level of which three would be continued via A2-level to full A-level status. This intended broadening of the examination curriculum for each student carried the implication of reduced time for non-examination elements of the overall sixth form curriculum; that is, less scope for introducing students to anthropology through the medium of "additional studies."

When the Pre-University Forum met thirteen months later (Mills 2001), the new A-level system was up-and-running, requiring delegates to confront the intricacies of its new structure, of the new language of "specifications" and "key skills," and of the institutional relationship between "awarding bodies" and the regulatory authorities. The principal outcome of the meeting, however, was a decision to rename the Forum "Broadening Anthropology" in recognition that increased access to higher education should not be presented as the only justification for promoting an awareness of anthropology among school and college students and their teachers.

"Broadening Anthropology" would not meet again. For a brief time it allowed enthusiasts to share a vision of anthropology joining the other social sciences in the mainstream of pre-university education. But the group lacked that essential connection to the professional discipline's key institutional networks that would guarantee their support.

From 2001-2003, the RAI undertook a strategic review of its role as a scholarly association. One outcome was a reassessment of its relations with other disciplinary bodies; another was recognition of a responsibility for promoting the discipline beyond the academy. The Institute's new Director, Hilary Callan, indicated the connection:

> Subject to funding, we hope that one concrete result of the ASA-organised meeting of heads of anthropology departments last October [2003] will be a collaboration between departments, the ASA and the RAI in a new initiative to improve awareness of anthropology in schools and boost recruitment to [undergraduate] courses. The RAI has moved away from its traditional reluctance to engage with advocacy in support of the discipline, and can share responsibility for this with partner bodies. Thus the foundations for change are being laid (if too slowly for some) (2004:27).

She was determined to revive the Institute's Education Committee after a gap of nearly two decades. The new committee - formally the *Committee on Anthropology in Secondary and Further Education* – met for the first time on 11 May 2004 under the chairmanship of Brian Street, mandated "to initiate, promote and develop strategies to disseminate knowledge and awareness of anthropology among pre-University and Further Education students and their teachers and advisers. *Particular attention will be paid to anthropology in curricula and as an examination subject*" (my emphasis).

Three proposals independently tabled for discussion at this first meeting urged the Institute to take a lead in working towards an A-level in anthropology. The RAI offered a bridgehead to the further

institutional support necessary for progress. A meeting of university heads of department now gave its strong backing: concern for undergraduate recruitment was a significant factor in their support, with a higher profile for anthropology in pre-university settings seen - in the words of one head of department - as "vital to the health" of the discipline.

A significant take-up of A-level anthropology would require university departments to rethink their introductory courses as they sought to balance the needs of new entrants holding or not holding this prior qualification. Partly to counter any concerns, the Education Committee emphasised its intention to create a specification that would be very distinctive from those offered to first-year undergraduates. In contrast to the *social* anthropology option of the International Baccalaureate, the A-level would present an integrated anthropology accommodating both social and biological elements, in part a reflection of the RAI's remit to represent all fields of the discipline. This broader approach would produce a more distinctive subject profile. The International Baccalaureate syllabus provided a very detailed coverage including many elements familiar from introductory undergraduate courses, but teachers were expected to be selective in their coverage of this ambitious syllabus and the course deliberately avoided prescribing set texts. In contrast, to ensure students received a comprehensive overview, the A-level specification would not offer a choice of content, but would offer less content in response to widespread teacher criticism of the content overload of some existing A-levels. In preparing a specification for the A-level, the committee intended to attach a suitable bibliography; in time, a dedicated textbook would be constructed around the core elements of the specification.

To move beyond the limitations of its periodic meetings, the Education Committee needed to attract funding to support its work. This chimed with the committee's own perception that an education officer had become a strategic priority. A grant application to the Higher Education Funding Council for England under its *AimHigher National Activity Rolling Programme* was successful in securing funding specifically to create the fixed term post of education officer for one year. The application stressed that the proposed activities of this appointee - including those relating to the A-level development - lay within the remit of the funding body to widen access to higher education for under-represented and disadvantaged groups. Noting the relative under-representation of anthropology undergraduates among the *AimHigher* target groups, the application argued the discipline had paradoxically the unique capacity to inspire "those who might not otherwise see a place for themselves in higher education, by highlighting the legitimacy of their distinctive historical, linguistic and cultural experience" (2005: 1).

A grant from the Economic and Social Research Council under its *Science in Society* strategy ensured the continuation of the education officer post for three years from January 2007. The remit of this strategy is to enhance the public visibility of social science in general and to sustain the demographic health of the social science disciplines. Therefore, the application for funds had identified anthropology's potential contribution to pre-university education both in general terms - to prepare young people for full participation in multi-cultural society - and for its likely beneficial impact on recruitment to undergraduate anthropology.

The opportunities made possible by the employment of an education officer gave a clear shape to the Institute's education programme. This could now be defined around three strands: a curricular strand, an information strand and an activity strand. The A-level project dominated the curricular strand and responsibility for its progress remained largely with the committee as a whole, with the Education Officer very actively taking the initiative in respect of the other strands. The development of a *Discover Anthropology* online resource (www.discoveranthropology.org.uk) within the information strand[vii] has the potential to complement the delivery of the A-level course as a portal for support materials.

As an alternative to the A-level project, a strategy of working towards the inclusion of anthropological elements in existing A-levels would have revived earlier concerns over the perils of "sub-contracting" the discipline or "diluting" it to the point of invisibility. However, the schools' citizenship curriculum suggested one area where anthropological content might be introduced without crowding out the scope

for an A-level in anthropology. Therefore, citizenship education remained a parallel interest of the committee for some time,[viii] although its primary focus was on pre-sixth form secondary students as the age groups for whom citizenship had become obligatory under the National Curriculum since 2000. However, citizenship in sixth forms could be approached through A-levels; and anthropology's "fit" with some core citizenship themes - such as social diversity and globalisation - was seen as potentially strengthening the case for the proposed A-level. Nevertheless, as the A-level project gathered its own momentum, citizenship education received diminishing attention.

Learning the Language of Curriculum Innovation

An A-level *specification document* issued by an awarding body must include details of the examinable content or syllabus, and the forms of assessment. The Education Committee would need, therefore, to prepare a specification for adoption by an awarding body[ix]. The awarding body would in turn submit the specification to the regulatory Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) for the necessary accreditation of the new A-level.

From 2000, a new structure for A-levels had introduced a modular system; each specification was presented as six units. Three contributed to the award of an Advanced Supplementary (AS) level representing the first half of an A-level. Alternatively, the AS-level could be taken as a stand-alone qualification weighted as 50% of a full A-level. The remaining three units ("A2-level") combined with AS-level to produce an A-level, although A2-level could not be taken as a stand-alone qualification. The complexity of examining A-levels on the basis of six units per subject led to the adoption of a four-unit structure for most subjects from September 2008. The Education Committee was able to anticipate this expected change in its discussions.

AS-level units are assessed at a standard appropriate for candidates who have completed their first year of study; that is, below the standard subsequently required for A2-level units. In addition to identifying subject content, therefore, the *specification document* would mark out a range of examinable skills ranked as a hierarchy of "assessment objectives."

Where a subject is likely to be offered by more than one awarding body, the QCA would stipulate a separate statement of *subject criteria* to identify the "essential" or core principles that define a subject and from which a specification of subject content could be fabricated. The overall justification for *subject criteria* documentation is to ensure that the specifications of rival awarding bodies represent a consistent standard. Clearly there was no expectation of producing more than one subject specification for anthropology and therefore no need to produce a separate *subject criteria* document for the accreditation process. However, with the need to produce a specification from scratch, it made sense to focus initially on identifying those subject criteria for anthropology from which a specification could be developed. The committee therefore began discussion of subject criteria from the autumn of 2004 based around an initial written draft I had prepared. A second draft was available by January, a third by April, and a fourth by June, each presented to successive meetings of the committee for discussion.

The statement of core principles demonstrated a strong bias towards social and cultural anthropology, belying the integrated conception of the A-level. This may well have reflected the under-representation of biological anthropologists on the committee especially in its early work, and the "social" influence of advisory networks including the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) / heads of anthropology departments and a reference group of (largely humanities and social science) teachers. As word of the committee's activities spread, the concern of some senior biological anthropologists was addressed informally to the Institute's Director. However, the RAI's tradition of representing both categories of anthropology, even if the appearance sometimes suggested a dominant social anthropology, was now reflected in the committee's approach - the committee would move on to devising a specification that purposely included biological elements.

Here, I should acknowledge a personal responsibility, and concern. As one of two "teacher representatives" on the committee, I had introduced to other members the unfamiliar concept of *subject criteria* and subsequently co-ordinated the successive drafts of that documentation. As explained above, this was not a strict requirement in the process of securing adoption and then accreditation of a single-specification A-level. Given the lengthy discussions devoted to the production of a subject criteria document, I was increasingly concerned to re-balance our activities and move on to the work of specifying subject content. Perhaps too much time was spent on establishing subject criteria and certainly there was little *conscious* attempt subsequently to translate the *written* principles into matching curriculum content. However, it could be argued that the main value of this long process was to attune the committee to the language of curriculum innovation.

The following fifteen months were spent specifying the subject content of the A-level. A four-unit scheme was tabled at the June 2005 committee meeting and became the template for much subsequent revision. At this time, I was granted funding from the Esperanza Trust to develop the A-level work of the committee; in effect to bring successive drafts of the specification documentation to the committee for further discussion and revision. Towards the end of this period, small groups of two or three Education Committee members would work on each unit; a "central sub-committee" of four would then pull the specification together for final discussion by the whole committee. The resulting documentation was now "ready" for submission to a "critical friend" familiar with the process of A-level accreditation, prior to making an advance to an awarding body.

The substance of the ongoing discussions is best understood through observing the changes made to the specification on a unit-by-unit basis. However, several general principles were readily accepted. The subject content needed to be made attractive by emphasising its relevance to an understanding of contemporary issues. This implied avoidance of a "traditional" emphasis of the "small-scale societies" kind. Instead, students were to be encouraged to reflect on their own experience anthropologically. The comparative perspective was emphasised as anthropology's distinct contribution, the approach that differentiated it from other social sciences. It followed that students should be drawn to contemporary ethnographic sources; the standard canon - defined by such studies as the Trobrianders or the Nuer - was inappropriate. The first unit should give a comprehensive overview of the subject, with each subsequent unit representing a clear progression.

Table 1. Successive changes to unit titles[a]

	June 2005 Preliminary draft	**May 2006 Revised draft (prior to small working groups)**	**January 2007 First submission to an awarding body**
Unit 1	Consumption and Exchange	Being Human (Introductory Module)	Being Human: Unity and Diversity
Unit 2	Identity and Belonging	Becoming a Person (A Comparative approach to Identity and Belonging)	Becoming a Person: Identity and Belonging
Unit 3	Societies and Development	Global and Local (Globalisation and Local Social Life)	Global and Local: globalisation and local social life
Unit 4	Knowledge and the Anthropologist	The Role of the Anthropologist (The Practice of Anthropology)	The Practice of Anthropology

[a] The accredited A-level specification bears the same unit 1 and 2 unit titles as in the January 2007 submission. The eventual unit 3 was revised as "Global and Local: Societies, Environments and Globalisation." The problematic unit 4 eventually acquired a title "Practising Anthropology: Methods and Investigations" that hints at active participation by students in the practice of anthropology.

The preliminary draft for unit 1 was quickly dismissed as too restrictive, with its theme of "consumption and exchange" now relegated to the small print of the unit's content. Instead, "what it is to be human" emerged as an integrating theme with a breadth of content capable of accommodating both social and biological elements; besides, "being human" provided good continuity to the second unit's emphasis on "becoming a person." By autumn 2006, the subject content of the two AS-level units had been specified in structure, detail and nomenclature in a form almost identical to its final version. The first unit introduced core themes of human unity and diversity and the second, themes of personal and group identity.

A third, A2-level, unit was structured to explore issues of globalisation and the relationship between global and local processes. "Development" was removed from unit 3's title and incorporated as one of a number of topics. At this stage, this unit was markedly "social" in content; its final form would demonstrate the opportunities for a more integrated approach by including content such as "migration patterns of ancestral humans" alongside modern people movement, and "ecological explanations of biological and social differences between human populations."

Unit 4 was to prove the most problematic. This required students to examine the production, communication and use of anthropological knowledge. From the outset it was intended that new taught material would be restricted to enable students to undertake "additional independent research" as a compulsory element, drawing synoptically upon their knowledge of content from this and earlier units. However, it was unclear what form this coursework would take – except that it would be necessarily small-scale – and how it, or more generally the whole unit, would be assessed. Admittedly, the whole issue of assessment of the individual units had yet to be tackled but it was implicitly understood that the first three units would be assessed through conventional written examinations.

A report of discussion within the very first meeting of the Education Committee in April 2004 on the International Baccalaureate's anthropology programme had noted "[t]he provision for student projects and their assessment drew particular approval." However, the committee now faced a dilemma.

Anticipating the revision to A-levels from September 2008 that would introduce the four-unit structure, the QCA had ruled that assessment based on coursework would not be acceptable except in those very few subjects where this form was integral to the practice of the discipline. The risk of plagiarism in the Internet age was cited in justification and played into the popular discourse of declining assessment standards. It seemed probable that anthropology would not succeed in making a case for the envisaged limited coursework, however essential the experience of ethnographic fieldwork might be to the professional discipline of (social) anthropology.

An October 2006 meeting of the Education Committee received feedback from the newly-formed Teachers" Reference (e-mail) Group, nineteen school and college teachers recruited by the Education Officer to comment on drafts of the specification. This cautioned against the inclusion of too much content in the subject specification and reflected a common refrain among teachers that post-2000 A-levels were too content-heavy and restricted classroom opportunities for wider discussions. Concern was also aired that a research project might be too ambitious to organise in school contexts and too time-consuming. In part these anxieties pointed to the need to clarify the committee's expectations and intentions, but more importantly they led to the recognition that pedagogic issues should be given greater consideration in drafting the specification content.

The Education Committee was now positioned by January 2007 to make an approach to an awarding body. The Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) seemed an unlikely first choice but, as the smallest of the four bodies covering England and Wales, had several advantages including a tolerance of lower candidate numbers than the other awarding bodies and, crucially, a deserved reputation for innovating imaginative courses. The latest versions of the *subject criteria* and *specification* documents were submitted to the WJEC along with a written rationale, "The Case for an A-level Qualification in

Anthropology." In its reply, the WJEC acknowledged "the considerable work that has already been done and the expectation that RAI would be significantly involved in the training and support that would be needed to set up the qualification," but cited a heavy workload of revisions to existing specifications in anticipation of the September 2008 changes, and declined to undertake a collaboration on the A-level project, "which during a less busy development period [they] would have been interested to pursue." The door, that is, remained open although there was an all-round expectation that the RAI committee would now approach other awarding bodies.

Reflecting on this first experience, it is clear that the approach had been very tentative. The presentation of separate *subject criteria* and *specification* documentation allowed the RAI to demonstrate the range of its achievements to date although the former document was becoming less important as its principles became progressively incorporated in the emerging specification of actual subject content. The treatment of assessment objectives and a scheme of assessment – both required in a final specification – had barely been addressed. The absence of specimen examination papers for each of the units was conspicuous and it remained unclear what standards would be expected of students at AS- and A2-level. In particular, it would become necessary to demonstrate that the demands of AS-level were appropriate to one-year of study in a new subject and that A2-level units met the requirement for synoptic assessment[x]. From September 2008, A2-level was further required to include opportunities for "stretch and challenge" of more able students. However, the main point of uncertainty lay with the treatment of the research project since the RAI again raised the possibility with the WJEC of anthropology being exempted from the general QCA proscription of internally-assessed coursework.

On the other hand, in presenting "The Case for an A-level Qualification in Anthropology" the RAI Education Committee had shown a keen appreciation of the issues that would need to be addressed to bolster the case. These included guarantees on the provision of support to teachers and of educational materials, a plausible estimation of student take-up, and a pool of prospective teachers qualified to teach the subject. Beyond this, the availability of suitably qualified examiners would become an important consideration. On these matters, the Education Committee envisaged "an active programme of cooperation with an awarding body throughout the development…of the proposed A-level, and continuing into the future" (2007: 4).

The economics of GCE provision indicate that A-levels typically require cross-subsidisation from "mass" GCSE"s. According to one QCA correspondent, the s*ustainability* of an A-level requires a year-on-year entry in excess of one thousand candidates although 10,000 entries define a "mass" subject. Correspondence with Edexcel, London-based and owned by publisher Pearson, showed this largest of the awarding bodies to have no interest in the anthropology A-level project; 20,000 entrants were cited as the commercial requirement for adoption of a new subject!

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) appeared a more attractive proposition. AQA is the largest provider of A-levels and, besides, offers an Archaeology specification that contains some anthropological content. The RAI's initial approach (November 2007) centred on a small delegation that included Brian Street and Hilary Callan, respectively the Chair of the Education Committee and RAI Director. A written "statement of commitment" was carried from the RAI's governing Council. In addition, the Chair of the Committee of Heads of Anthropology Departments convened by the ASA wrote approvingly of the A-level initiative, drawing attention to its value for recruitment to undergraduate anthropology and more widely "as a rigorous and relevant preparation for entry into many other kinds of university courses." He stressed the broad occupational relevance of anthropology beyond the university sector and the strong endorsement for an A-level in the subject from "the committee of distinguished international scholars" that had conducted the ESRC International Benchmarking Review of social anthropology's international research standing. Significantly, he identified with the RAI's co-operative strategy: "The UK Anthropology departments will be willing and able to assist the RAI and the Awarding Body in various practical ways to establish *and maintain* this new A-level programme" (my emphasis).

In fact, the Committee had found itself leaning against an open door! The case for anthropology did not have to be argued; discussion had centred on how to bring the A-level project to fruition but the merit of the project had been taken-for-granted. A minimum candidature of five hundred defined the viability of the qualification.

The nearly two years between this adoption of the A-level by the awarding body and the final accreditation of the award by the qualifications regulator in October 2009 represented the most intensive period of work to bring the project to completion. Efforts were now directed at preparing the case for accreditation. The RAI Education Committee worked on the remaining tasks with AQA acting to advise and subsequently to carry forward the submission to the regulator. Attention was now given to the forms of assessment to be applied to the four units, in the detail required to produce a specimen question paper for each together with a complementary mark-scheme, collectively identified (without apparent irony) by the acronym SPAMS! Of particular concern, the structure of unit 4 remained unresolved: AQA sought to present to the regulator the idea of internally-assessed coursework but held out little prospect of its approval.

The skills to be assessed at AS and A2-level are arranged in a hierarchy of so-called "assessment objectives." The scheme of assessment for anthropology proposed a flattened hierarchy of just two sets of objective: the first covering the skills of knowledge, understanding and communication; the second involving application, analysis, interpretation and evaluation. These two sets are common to both AS and A2-level but the "higher" skills of the second are given more weight in the mark-schemes for A2 units. With examination marks allocated to each assessment objective, mark-schemes were additionally required to differentiate between degrees of skill shown by candidates. Inevitably, given the "technical" nature of the required assessment documentation, I took initial responsibility for this work; responsibility then passed to a small "sub-committee" with oversight from AQA.

By the end of April 2008, AQA was in a position to submit the A-level proposal to the regulator for accreditation. As an established academic discipline, the case for a distinct A-level in anthropology was not hard to demonstrate. And the support for the A-level from such stakeholders as the discipline's professional associations and university departments was clearly in evidence. The primary concern for the regulator was, therefore, to establish that the structure of assessment conformed to the requirements for an award at "A-level." In particular, the need to apply to specimen question papers and associated mark-schemes the full set of assessment objectives, and the means to differentiate varying levels of candidate performance, occasioned frequent revision of points-of-detail. The form taken by this "conversation" between awarding body (and Education Committee) and regulator required unresolved issues to be progressively "signed off" following further revision. The drive to standardisation within the post-2000 A-level system has been criticised for promoting a "tick box" mentality that encourages too much emphasis on the teaching of examination technique. Certainly there was a technique for meeting the expectations of the regulators - for example, identifying a form of words that would resolve a point at issue. Unsurprisingly, the awarding body appeared adept at negotiating this aspect of the regulatory bureaucracy!

Looking back, the process of accreditation would take nearly 18 months. An earlier proposal from AQA to pilot the A-level, already delayed by one year, was now quietly dropped as it became clear that September 2010 was the earliest feasible date to launch the A-level. In fact, in the same month as the submission, the QCA's regulatory role was transferred to a new body, the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), and its remaining functions to a re-branded Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA)[xi]. The lead-in time applied to these new agencies meant the accreditation negotiations would continue with the QCDA but, nearing the end of the process and occasioning further delay, it would be Ofqual who granted formal accreditation of the A-level award.

In the interim, uncertainty continued to hang over unit 4. Collectively, the committee had agreed - in its first approach to AQA - to support a personal study amounting to a small-scale research project, however handled in assessment terms. The subsequent submission to QCDA would argue for internal assessment of the study by teachers with external moderation by the awarding body. The case for the research project - to give students a taste of the anthropological experience of collecting and analysing primary data - was sympathetically received by QCDA but, with an eye on an uncompromising Ofqual, the method of internal assessment was rejected. The committee now presented a less collective face: some members argued against a personal study citing both logistical problems and the demands placed on teachers who ideally would need to have had some personal experience of ethnographic practice. However, to have argued forcefully for a personal study only now to reverse that position would, at the very least, represent an embarrassing U-turn by the committee. Therefore, a collective identity was re-established around a version of unit 4 that would permit a personal study (or "investigation" in the currency of the awarding body) without internal assessment. Instead, a written examination would (externally) assess the taught component of the unit and, by setting questions on the student experience of the research process, the investigation. An example (from the specimen paper) illustrates this approach: "Comment on problems you anticipated and/or encountered in your investigation, and how you dealt with them." In reaching this solution, the committee had been able to learn from a similar approach adopted for an existing A-level geography specification.

News of Ofqual's decision to grant accreditation to the A-level anthropology specification reached members of the committee on 13th October 2009. Less than one year remained before teaching towards the new award would commence. Promoting the new A-level and the appointment of a team of examiners were tasks for the awarding body, AQA. The RAI undertook to provide teaching materials; in the short term identifying suitable existing textual and visual sources; but working in the current medium term (a period determined chiefly by the constraints of publishing) towards production of a course textbook and a reader.

Conclusion

Writing in 2005, Brian Morris, for long a strong advocate, could wearily note "yet another Education Committee of the RAI is considering an A-level in anthropology" (2005: 23). Why did this latest attempt move beyond an aspiration and succeed?

It is clear there has been a significant shift of opinion within professional anthropology in the later period towards support for pre-university anthropology in general and the A-level development in particular. Several factors may account for this. Prior to the 1990s, it remained possible for a small discipline such as anthropology to occupy a niche position in the university sector, its fortunes, like those of the other social sciences, tied to the material support of the state. Subsequently, the move to a "mass" higher education, accompanied by an increasing application of "market principles" that prioritised the need to attract students, exposed the particular vulnerability of minority disciplines. Raising the public profile of the discipline among sixth form students, their parents, teachers, and future employers was in part a response to this threat.

A corollary of a mass higher education system was the emphasis now placed on widening participation among previously under-represented or disadvantaged groups. A 2005 report on the annual London Anthropology Day that sought to give sixth form students a taste of undergraduate anthropology, noted the disproportionate number of attendees from independent schools and commented that several of the participating university departments faced no recruitment problems in terms of overall numbers but were failing to attract a socially diverse intake of undergraduates. As a route into higher education, the International Baccalaureate - small in national scale and over-represented in the independent sector - was likely to accentuate the problem; only an A-level would have the reach into state schools that might permit increased contact with less-advantaged students and their teachers.

The RAI has a tradition of inclusive membership and this is reflected in the composition of its current Education Committee, drawn from both higher and secondary and further education. The contribution of academic anthropologists has been essential to the credibility of the A-level project, but when - as in the drafting of assessment criteria or, more generally, acquiring a sense of "advanced level"- they were taken out of their professional comfort zone, other members with current sixth form teaching experience were on hand to lend direction. The committee's methodology for developing the A-level was established early on. An especially active core of members would work intensively, either individually or as a group, to prepare and re-draft key documents. The wider committee provided front-line discussion but was able to call upon its networks of academics, teachers and educationalists for further advice and comment.

Looking back several decades to earlier discussions of an A-level, it is striking how these focused on *social* anthropology and, given sociology's ascent, offered little prospect of anthropology filling an obvious gap in the overall A-level curriculum. In proposing a holistic version of anthropology, the recent project drew implicitly on an interpretation of contemporary anthropology as a unifying science of humankind; and was more easily able to satisfy the regulators that it could bring something unique to the curriculum table! It remains to be seen whether teachers - especially those seeking to maintain sociology's A-level profile - share this view of anthropology and sociology as complementary A-level subjects.

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Over time the self-confidence of teachers of A-level anthropology is likely to grow, reflected in an increased sense of "ownership" of their course and close working relationship with the awarding body that now owns the copyright to the specification. It therefore makes sense for the RAI to develop permanent ties with this constituency in ways that would enable teachers to identify with the Institute. A useful start might involve the creation of a teachers' membership section within the RAI. British anthropology, as a small and relatively coherent academic community, has through its institutional networks exercised an unusually strong influence over the curriculum development narrated in this article. For the foreseeable future that influence is likely to be retained: a recent communication from the RAI Education Committee to heads of anthropology departments solicits "the active participation of university departments" (in providing support to A-level teachers and, more generally, promoting the discipline in schools) as "likely to be as important to the future success of the A-level as their early support was crucial to its development." There lies the challenge!

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Notes

[i] David Mills has referred to the earlier period in (1999), (2010) and (2011).
[ii] For complementary treatments see (Street 2010) and (Callan and Street 2010).
[iii] Some provision of anthropology at 16+ had been possible through the medium of the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) aimed at less academic students. Mode 3 programmes allowed for centres to devise their own accredited syllabuses for internal assessment. However, CSE was incorporated with GCE O-levels into the new GCSE structure in 1988 and Mode 3 arrangements ceased. 16+ education gave prominence to the National Curriculum in the following decade, further restricting opportunities for curriculum innovation in the social sciences at this level.
[iv] This was subsequently merged into a wider network encompassing sociology and politics: C-SAP.
[v] These themes had emerged at a NNTLA workshop on "Teaching Anthropology in Different Contexts" at Keele University, February 1998.
[vi] Few IB centres in the UK currently teach social anthropology as an option. World-wide, less than 2% of all examination entries related to social anthropology in 2010 (http:/www.ibo.org/).
[vii] The intended launch in 2007 was postponed until 2010, a delay reflecting the volume of initiatives and activities concurrently undertaken by the Education Officer as much as the complexities of creating an online resource.
[viii] This interest was promoted by committee member Barry Dufour whose long term advocacy of anthropology in secondary education, like that of chairman Brian Street, reaches back to the Corlett era.
[ix] The modern term for an examinations board, of which there are four serving England and Wales: the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA), Cambridge Assessment (OCR), Edexcel, and the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC). Each awarding body cannot offer more than one specification in a subject but may compete with other bodies offering rival specifications in the same subject.
[x] To avoid the risk of modular A-levels comprising unrelated units, students would be assessed in part on their knowledge across unit boundaries. The assessment of A2 units was required to offer these synoptic opportunities, building on knowledge from earlier AS units.
[xi] The QCDA retained responsibility for supervision of the National Curriculum and associated tests. The QCDA now faces abolition when its responsibilities will be transferred to the Department for Education.
[xii] References to published sources are given in the text. Where authorship or citations are not given, the references are to materials held in the RAI Archives (A85, Education Committee 1974-1985) or in the RAI files (including electronic files) of the current Education Committee.