



Beyond Anthropology A level: opening up anthropology education

Emma Ford

Education and Communications Officer, Royal Anthropological Institute

Introduction

Since November 2014, I have been the Education and Communications Officer of the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI). I work on the RAI 'Discover Anthropology' Education Programmeⁱ and am in contact with a network of people involved in anthropology education: the RAI Education Committeeⁱⁱ, anthropology academics, university administrators concerned with widening access, university students, school and college teachers, school and college students, parents, lifelong learners and members of the general public. Having a recognised qualification for 16-18 year olds in schools and colleges brought about positive changes across this network of anthropology educators, bringing the subject into schools and colleges which had never offered it before. Biological anthropology had a place in pre-university education alongside Social anthropology. The A level diversified the community of anthropology educators and increased links between local schools and colleges and university anthropology departments. It facilitated important discussions amongst anthropology educators about what education is and should be. Even though relatively few colleges or schools in the UK offer the anthropology A level, the qualification has had a significant impact on the students and teachers who engage with it.

AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance) announced in early 2015 that they would withdraw and not redevelop the A level. Members of the anthropology education community sprang into action; the RAI set up meetings with AQA to see if the decision could be reversed and contacted other awarding bodies to see if a new provider could be found. The RAI drew upon its global links with anthropological associations around the world and organised a teacher support session at the RAI for teachers to talk about the decision. Elsewhere in this issue Middlemiss describes her work setting up the petition that captured comments from around the world. Members of the RAI Education Committee, A level and IB teachers and their students and undergraduate and postgraduate anthropology students wrote letters to AQA, local MPs and the press, posting on social media, signing the petition and making videos and taking photographs with their classes. Despite this, the decision remained unchanged.

The first half of this article sets out the challenges that anthropology faced as an A level qualification, whilst the second half goes on to demonstrate the A level's achievements and the initiatives that it facilitated. Many of these formal outreach initiatives and informal networks continue to flourish, demonstrating the demand for a subject that is intrinsically rewarding to study and relevant to students' lives.

Qualifications: why they matter

Contemporary societies value educational qualifications for two overarching reasons. Firstly, they are deemed to have an intrinsic value as they enhance the student's understanding and abilities. Secondly, qualifications hold symbolic value within a wider system of social relations. Particular qualifications create opportunities; their cultural capital can be used in conjunction with things like interview performance, personal statements and CVs to gain a university place or employment (Bourdieu, 1973, 1976). For a sixth form qualification to be deemed valuable in the wider social system, a myriad of factors come into play: who offers the qualification, how it is regulated, how widely it is recognised by employers and universities, how it is perceived by the general public, how useful it is deemed to be for a student's future and whether there is a tradition for teaching it at pre-university level to name but a few. A qualification's intrinsic educational value and its symbolic value for social relations are obviously linked; employers recruit those who have certain knowledge and skills and a qualification's symbolic value influences how people feel

about its intrinsic educational value. I make the distinction because the anthropology A level faced its greatest challenges *transforming* its intrinsic educational value into a qualification that functioned symbolically within the wider educational system and society.

Regulation and Awarding Bodies: big is beautiful

Ofqual (Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation) 'regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England'. They 'maintain standards and confidence in qualifications in England' including AS levels, A levels, GCSEs and vocational qualifications'... they are 'independent of government and report directly to Parliament' (Ofqual, 2016). A regulator is necessary because there are multiple exam boards offering A levels and schools and colleges often offer A levels from a range of different awarding bodiesⁱⁱⁱ for their different subjects. Awarding bodies must demonstrate that their qualifications have sufficient validity (the degree to which a qualification measures what needs to be measured) and are comparable: a grade B in a subject provided by one exam board must be comparable with a grade B in the subject by another exam board and in another year of examination for the wider system to function. Additionally, a grade B in one A level subject should reflect the same level of achievement as a B in another subject. For subjects with small student entry figures (such as those like anthropology A level which have been running for a relatively short time), statistical comparison is much less reliable and there is a smaller 'examiner pool' to draw from. Without confidence in comparable quality across subjects, a qualification's value within the social wider system is called into question (regardless of its intrinsic educational value for individual students and society). Awarding bodies are part of this web of regulation because Ofqual regulates the A levels that awarding bodies offer.

There is a tendency to underestimate the amount of work involved in every qualification that awarding bodies offer, from the early design of the qualification all the way through to exam results being issued and delivered to schools and colleges. It is mainly the 'scandals' that reach public attention, rather than all that awarding bodies accomplish: moving hundreds of qualifications through development cycles of tight yearly deadlines to meet changing requirements from the regulator. This process includes gaining accreditation from Ofqual, which, for a single qualification, can take multiple iterations before the regulator accepts them. Frequent educational reforms from changing governments and new policies impact on awarding bodies, schools, colleges, teachers and students, who must all adapt their qualifications, teaching and learning to ever-shifting goalposts. To meet Ofqual's increasingly demanding requirements for validity and comparability throughout the lifecycle of a qualification, awarding bodies make decisions to not redevelop qualifications which could have high potential risks in terms of delivery and assessment and low returns for them as an organisation. AQA's recent decision to halt redevelopment work (which was already under way) on A level archaeology, history of art, classical civilisation and statistics on 12th October 2016 was communicated in terms of regulation, safety and risk. AQA explain on their website that scholarly and professional bodies were not consulted as part of this decision-making process because 'these communities are not part of the ongoing technical monitoring of assessment and risk relating to grade boundaries and qualification design'^{iv} (AQA, 2016; Phillips, 2016). These decisions inevitably impact on educational opportunities for 16-18 years olds, raising important questions about what drives change in the educational landscape, who is accountable for the breadth of education available in schools and colleges and what the long-term effects of these decisions will be.

Perceptions of A level subjects: facilitating subjects, traditional subjects and informed choice

The potential market for an A level is linked with how students actually choose their A level subjects and what is on offer at their school or college. At A level, students take either three, four or (exceptionally) five subjects. The Russell Group publish an 'Informed Choices' guide which encourages students to be strategic about A level subject selection: 'it can be tempting simply to choose subjects that you enjoy and which interest you'. Nevertheless, 'there's no getting away from the fact that the subjects you study in the sixth form or at college will determine which degree courses will be open to you in future'(Russel Group, 2013:1). The guide encourages students to take two 'facilitating subjects'; these tend to be 'traditional' subjects (which have long been on offer in pre-university education) that allow students options to keep doors open for a variety of University courses if a student is still undecided about exactly which course they wish to study. Indeed, Glenys Stacey, Chief Regulator at Ofqual stated that the more traditional subjects were seen as 'very good currency' for entry into the most competitive universities because they are either a requirement or recommended for entry into many courses (Sellgren, 2015). Anthropology is not a facilitating subject; anthropology A level is not a required or preferred qualification for any university course, not even a BA or BSc in anthropology. Whilst it could provide a student breadth as a third or fourth option and may (as many attest) have great intrinsic educational value for the students that study it, this does not mean it will ever become highly sought after within the wider A-level sphere.

The idea that A level subjects have a cluster of terms associated with them such as 'hard' (intellectually challenging, traditional, focused) or 'soft' (less intellectually challenging, new, composite) demonstrates another way that the value of an A level is socially constructed. Despite all the regulation and call for comparability, in the minds of universities (and Ofqual) different A level subjects are not thought of as equal.

Anthropology A level and the RAI Discover Anthropology Education Programme

Having outlined some of the challenges anthropology A level faced as a qualification, I will now show how anthropology A level is embedded within a broader anthropology education landscape. Widening access to anthropology was a driving force in the creation, development and support of the anthropology A level, yet it is just one component of an ongoing programme of pre-university anthropology education undertaken by the RAI. Since the 1970s, opportunities for anthropology education waxed, waned and waxed again in tune with changing educational policy. In 2004, the RAI Education Committee was reformed and charged with 'promoting the discipline beyond its established home in higher education' (Basu, 2016:3). Creating an anthropology A level qualification had long been the ambition of Hilary Callan and Brian Street. Widening access to anthropology for students who would not normally encounter led to funding from HEFCE AimHigher (2005-2007) and the Economic and Social Research Council (2007-2010) and supported the creation of the post of RAI Education Officer and the early years of the RAI 'Discover Anthropology' Education programme. This programme includes Curricular, Activity and Resource strands.

The Curricular strand supports existing qualifications like anthropology A level and the International Baccalaureate Diploma in Social and Cultural anthropology alongside new qualifications which are being developed, such as those described by Joy Hendry (see this issue) working with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). The Activity Strand of the programme includes events for students and teachers (such as the RAI/LSHTM 'Anthropology of Health in Africa' workshop) and larger events such as London Anthropology Day (LAD). London Anthropology Day is an annual university taster day. It was first organised in 2004 by Professor Sara Randall and sponsored by UCL's Widening Participation Unit; extending the reach of anthropology to students who have not traditionally had access to it^{vi} (Basu, 2008). Now part of the RAI's Education Programme, widening access to anthropology remains at its core, educating 16-18 year olds about anthropology alongside accompanying parents and careers advisors. An LAD teacher support session allows a range of pre-university anthropology teachers to gather and exchange ideas and the main workshops provide ethnographic examples they can use with their classes. Finally, the Resource strand of the Discover Anthropology Programme strand provides information and resources for students, teachers and the general public about anthropology and includes 'Discover Anthropology' website and social media platforms^{vii}.

Curriculum outreach: Anthropology A level and Beyond

I now turn to the A level's achievements and the initiatives the qualification prompted. In terms of widening access, a key triumph of anthropology A level was the fact it was being taught in *state* schools and colleges as well as private schools and colleges. Raising the public profile of anthropology goes hand-in-hand with increasing opportunities for anthropology education at *all* educational and socioeconomic levels; a discipline which is so well placed to thoughtfully engage with human diversity should not just be accessible to those with the highest levels of economic, social and cultural capital in society. Notably, the SQA units currently being developed will be available for a range of educational centres in Scotland (not just schools and colleges) for students aged 13 years of age and upwards.

The presence of anthropology in the Norwegian schools system provided 'a small drop of anthropology' which has helped the wider recognition of the discipline in the public sphere (Hylland Eriksen, 2016). In the UK, anthropology A level was taught in a relatively small proportion of schools and colleges, but where drops of anthropology fell, ripples followed. Through my role as RAI Education and Communications Officer I visited anthropology A level teachers and students in their classrooms. Students told me that their friends had a sense of what anthropology was (even if they didn't study the course) because it was on offer at their school. An accredited A level increased awareness of the discipline amongst parents and careers advisors. Some anthropology A-level students explained that, although they planned to study nursing at university or go straight into employment, they felt that through studying anthropology they were better prepared to work a variety of people and to question stereotypes and assumptions. The idea that studying anthropology fails to produce transferable skills indicates a problem of *translation* rather than absence. As Bennett argues, during the financial crisis, economists modelled behaviour as if humans behaved with a universal rationality (overlooking cultural and historical factors). Developing students' capacity for 'critical thinking and [an] ability to see the bigger picture' has never been more important (Bennett, 2015:68). Indeed, anthropologists

are increasingly working alongside digital engineers, designers, and computer programmers to create things people use^{viii}.

Qualifications like anthropology A-level and the International Baccalaureate are brought to life by the anthropology teachers^{ix} who deliver them; working with these teachers is one of the highlights of my job. As teachers may not have previously studied anthropology themselves, they learn as they go, giving up their time and energy to build their knowledge through connections with other teachers, academics, events and resources. To help facilitate this, I circulate news, events and resources to an anthropology teachers mailing list. I also organise anthropology teacher support sessions at the RAI to give local teachers a chance to meet face-to-face with other teachers and upload resources from these sessions^x. Content is delivered for teachers, by teachers, sometimes in collaboration with academic anthropologists. A 'democratic anthropology' and the idea of widening access relies on the contributions of these teachers (Bennett, 2015:71). The diversification of those teaching anthropology in different settings presents exciting opportunities to learn from each other; pre-university teachers bring specialist knowledge and experience to the community of anthropology educators. All teachers (in pre-university and university settings) can offer insights into how anthropological education should be framed and delivered.

Qualifications like anthropology A-level and the social and cultural anthropology IB diploma create the potential for greater collaborations between pre-university anthropology and university anthropology. Events like 'Brunel A level Anthropology Conference', 'Sussex Anthropology Conference' and 'Society and Biology: The View from Anthropology' at the University of Roehampton were events organised and run collaboratively between teachers, anthropology academics at nearby universities and undergraduate student volunteers. These events not only strengthened the links between anthropology departments and local schools and colleges, but also brought A level students from other disciplines into contact with anthropology for the first time. These events were initiated by enthusiastic individuals (including school and college teachers and university lecturers) who gave up their time for a cause they believed in. With the final anthropology A level exams taking place in the Summer of 2018 (with resits in June 2019), we must ensure that the enthusiasm, knowledge and contacts which A level teachers bring to anthropology education are not lost, even if the A level qualification itself is no longer available in schools and colleges.

Anthropology A level should also be credited for bringing biological anthropology into 16-18 education, especially in state schools where it had not been taught previously. Biological anthropology is not part of the IB Diploma in social and cultural anthropology, nor does human evolution feature significantly in biology A level syllabuses. Undoubtedly, biological anthropology presents some challenges at pre-university level; it's a field which is constantly changing due to new discoveries. Although topics like human evolution can be sensitive to teach in schools and colleges, the combination of biological and social disciplines within a single qualification was an asset of anthropology A level; it demonstrated how a holistic understanding of humans and non-human primates helps students understand what makes us human.

Informal anthropology education: new networks and engagements

Having discussed the benefits of having a qualification like anthropology A level in schools and colleges, I now consider ways to reach students who do not have anthropology in their school curriculum and complementary goals regarding anthropology education in the wider public sphere.

In instances where anthropology qualifications are not on offer at a school or college, some have the resources to develop links with their existing biology curriculum alongside extra-curricular activities, clubs and prizes. I was invited to visit Hereford Cathedral School by Elena Segalini-Bower (Head of Biology). At Hereford Cathedral School they have amassed a collection of hominid casts, run a Human Biology Prize for year 9 students and engaged sixth formers run their own anthropology club (Segalini-Bower, 2015). They also invite heads of biology from other schools to consider introducing biological anthropology into their biology teaching. Incorporating human evolution and forensic anthropology into the school offering clearly requires financial resources, specialist knowledge and, most importantly, additional time commitments from staff and students which may be beyond what some schools and colleges can offer. Fee-paying schools and colleges often have greater flexibility with what and how they teach. They have the resources to bring out multiple links between anthropology and other subjects. How students access the cultural capital of an anthropology education is worth considering here; it is now, more than ever, important to find ways for all students to have the opportunity to discover biological anthropology, irrespective of whether their school is publicly or privately funded.

Alongside RAI educational events like London Anthropology Day which provide a taster of the breadth and content of anthropology, over the last six years the RAI's public events programme has expanded to around three events per week and range from research seminars, book launches, ethnomusicology performances, conferences to film screenings^{xi}. As Bennett has argued, 'public engagement is also an opportunity for public education'; the two complement each other (Bennett, 2015:69). The majority of these events are open to the public and are free to attend. The internet also provides new opportunities for informal anthropology education; at London Anthropology Day 2016, the 'Why We Post' project ran workshops and a stall for attendees (FutureLearn, 2016; UCL, 2016). This is a multi-sited global research project into the uses and consequences of social media, has developed a website, open access books, and a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course). Through video clips and interactive forums, this is a prime example of fusing research, technology and publicly available creative content that can light the flame of enthusiasm about a subject. Whilst it could be argued that informal learning can have its limitations (free online MOOCs tend to have a relatively low level of completion compared with those who start the course), their potential reach and ease of access can outweigh this. Online learning also is appealing for those interested in lifelong learning; I get enquiries from adults who want to study anthropology during their leisure time either via MOOCs or through short face-to-face evening courses (City Lit, 2016).

There is also much that can be done through extra-curricular and informal education to close the gap that still exists between anthropological skills and career prospects. With rising university fees encouraging a cost-benefit assessment of higher education, people base educational decisions in part on career options for the future: 'parents encourage students to make 'practical' choices with direct economic benefits' (Street, 2013:59). The gap can be reduced from both ends: increasing public awareness and employer awareness of the discipline whilst simultaneously providing opportunities for anthropology students to translate their anthropological skillset and demonstrate what anthropologists can offer (Gwynne, 2003; Briller and Goldmacher, 2009). It would be beneficial if pre-university, undergraduate and postgraduate students of anthropology pursue and are offered more extra-curricular opportunities to meet, receive informal mentoring and even work-shadow graduates of anthropology who have gone on to work in a range of 'applied' careers^{xiii}. Mutually beneficial to students and researchers, both gain practical experience of translating anthropology's skillset, methods and insights to different people.

Conclusion

The provision of anthropology at A level has achieved a great deal. In terms of widening access it brought new students, teachers and members of the public into contact with anthropology for the first time. As part of a broader educational programme, it diversified the community of anthropology educators, prompted pedagogical discussions and facilitated collaborative events and conversations between pre-university anthropology teachers and university-based anthropologists. It was particularly significant for its role in bringing biological anthropology into state schools and colleges. A commitment to widening access remains at the core of the broader anthropology education movement; we must continue to collaborate across educational settings, educate and learn from our colleagues and engage with those outside of the discipline. Most importantly, we must harness the expertise, knowledge and effervescent energy which anthropology A level generated to propel us forward with existing initiatives and new opportunities.

References

- AQA (2016) *AS and A-level qualifications update: October 2016*. AQA Website. [Online] [Accessed on 27th October 2016] <http://www.aqa.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/policy/gcse-and-a-level-changes/qualifications-update>.
- Basu, P. (2008) 'Extending the Educational Reach of Anthropology? Reflections on London Anthropology Day 2008.' *Anthropology Today*, 24(5) pp. 25–26.
- Basu, P. (2016) 'Anthropology education and public engagement: Where do we go from here?' *Anthropology Today*, 32(2) pp. 3–4.
- Bennett, D. (2015) 'The Global Financial Crisis, Anthropology and Public Education: A Review Essay.' *Teaching Anthropology*, 5(October 2008) pp. 64–73.
- Bourdieu, P. (1973) 'Cultural reproduction and social reproduction.' *In Power and Ideology in Education*, pp. 487–511.
- Bourdieu, P. (1976) 'The School as a conservative force: scholastic and cultural inequalities.' *In Dale (ed), R. (ed.) Schooling and capitalism: a sociological reader*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, in association with The Open University Press.
- Briller, S. H. and Goldmacher, A. (2009) *Designing an anthropology career : professional development exercises*. Lanham MD: AltaMira Press.

- Callan, H., Brian, S. and Simon, U. (2013) *Introductory readings in anthropology*. New York: Berghahn Books in association with the Royal Anthropological Institute.
- City Lit (2016) *City Lit Anthropology Courses*. [Online] [Accessed on 15th July 2016] <http://www.citylit.ac.uk/courses/history-culture-and-writing/anthropology>.
- FutureLearn (2016) *Why We Post FutureLearn Course*. [Online] [Accessed on 15th July 2016] <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/anthropology-social-media>.
- Gwynne, M. A. (2003) *Applied anthropology: a career-oriented approach*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Hendry, J. and Simon, U. (2012) *Anthropology: a beginner's guide*. Oxford: Oneworld Pub.
- Hylland Eriksen, T. (2016) 'A small drop of anthropology: Experiences from Norwegian secondary school.' *In IUAES Inter Congress 2016*. Dubrovnik.
- Ofqual (2016) *Ofqual Website - About*. [Online] [Accessed on 15th July 2016] <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual/about>.
- Phillips, K. (2016) *AQA Letter to Archaeology Centres: Confirmation of our plans for AS and A-Level Archaeology under Government Reform*. [Online] [Accessed on 25th October 2016] http://new.archaeologyuk.org/Content/downloads/5033_AQA_archaeology_A-level_letter.pdf.
- Pountney, L. and Maric, T. (2015) *Introducing anthropology*. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Russel Group (2013) *Informed Choices*. [Online] [Accessed on 15th July 2016] <http://russellgroup.ac.uk/media/5320/informedchoices.pdf>.
- Segalini-Bower, E. (2015) *Inspiring Biology Speakers*. Blog. [Online] [Accessed on 27th October 2016] <http://www.herefordcs.com/annual-biology-monmouth-group>.
- Sellgren, K. (2015) 'A-levels and GCSEs: Traditional exam subjects making comeback.' *BBC News Website*. [Online] 5th August. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-33787751>.
- Shore, C. and Wright, S. (2000) 'Coercive Accountability: the Rise of Audit Culture in Higher Education.' *In Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy*, pp. 57–88.
- Shore, C. and Wright, S. (2015) 'Governing by numbers: Audit culture, rankings and the new world order.' *Social Anthropology*, 23(1) pp. 22–28.
- Street, B. (2013) 'Anthropology in and of Education.' *Teaching Anthropology*, 3(1) pp. 57–60.
- UCL (2016) *Why We Post*. [Online] [Accessed on 1st July 2016] <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/why-we-post>.

Endnotes

- ⁱ This programme has curricular, activity and resource strands, spanning formal and informal education.
- ⁱⁱ The RAI Education Committee have been instrumental in the creation, development and support of Anthropology A level.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Such as AQA, OCR and Edexcel
- ^{iv} It is worth noting that a trend towards regulation, numerical analysis and auditing is not unique to pre-university education; it is increasingly prevalent in the Higher Education sector too (Shore and Wright, 2000, 2015).
- ^v Identified by the Russell Group as Biology, English Literature, History, Modern and classical languages, Chemistry, Geography, Physics, Maths and further maths (<http://russellgroup.ac.uk/for-students/school-and-college-in-the-uk/subject-choices-at-school-and-college/>)
- ^{vi} See www.londonanthropologyday.co.uk
- ^{vii} As Mills and Bennett discuss in this issue, the A level was launched before resources were readily available for teachers. The RAI created texts such as 'Introductory Readings in Anthropology' and 'Anthropology a Beginner's Guide' (Hendry and Simon, 2012; Callan et al., 2013). The RAI sent out starter packs of these texts and some ethnographic films to new centres who took up Anthropology A level. More recently, published resources have come from teachers themselves; two Anthropology A-level teachers developed a visually engaging textbook to complement the A level curriculum. In September 2015 the RAI hosted the book launch of this textbook: 'Introducing anthropology' (Pountney and Maric, 2015).
- ^{viii} The EASA 'Why the World Needs Anthropology' Conference will showcase such collaborations on 4th – 5th November 2016 <http://www.applied-anthropology.com/>
- ^{ix} I refer here to Anthropology A level teachers, IB teachers, Access Course Teachers, Further Education Teachers, Teachers of Evening Courses for Adults and (non-university) teachers at all levels who like to incorporate aspects of anthropology into teaching and extracurricular activities. Lecturers who teach anthropology in University settings are also 'teachers', but here I just refer to those who teach outside university settings.
- ^x See the 'Resourced' website Anthropology Exchange <http://www.resourcd.com/@anthropologyexchange/>
- ^{xi} <https://www.therai.org.uk/events-calendar>
- ^{xii} The RAI Education Programme already includes some aspects of this in its events; in November 2015 I co-organised with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM)'s Public Engagement Coordinator, a joint RAI and LSHTM 'Anthropology of Health in Africa' event for 27 students and 5 teachers of anthropology A-level and IB classes. The afternoon of workshops challenged 16-18 year olds to consider how anthropologists can contribute towards public

health responses to issues like the Ebola crisis and the ethical dilemmas they could face when working in global health contexts. See

https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/aboutus/introducing/publicengagement/casestudies/evaluation_of_the_anthropology_of_health_in_africa.pdf