

The Association of Heads of University Administration

A HISTORY OF THE ASSOCIATION AND REFLECTIONS ON HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

John Hogan, Member of AHUA 1999–2022



The Association of Heads of University Administration

Key Dates

- 1939? ● First Registrars' Conference
- 1961 ● Renamed as Conference of Registrars and Secretaries (CRS)
- 1962 ● Steering Committee established
- 1964 ● First training course for administrators was organised by CRS members
- 1980 ● Enlarged Steering Committee and first Business Secretary appointed
- 1987 ● Pattern of an Annual and September Conference adopted
- 1993 ● Post-1992 universities included in CRS
- 1994 ● Renamed as the Association of Heads of University Administration
- 1998 ● Steering Committee changed to Executive Committee
- 2001 ● Full-time Executive Officer appointed
- 2006 ● National sponsor selected
- 2010 ● Learning sets and coaching introduced
- 2014 ● Enhanced web site content



Introduction

Those responsible for leading administrative and managerial services in higher education institutions face a myriad of challenges from the operational to the strategic.

It is striking that for 85 years the heads of administration have come together to exchange ideas on the development of the sector and the provision of services.

There have been massive changes in higher education and the remit of such senior staff: titles, resources, and expectations have changed almost beyond recognition and yet the value of networking with senior colleagues from other institutions has endured.

This is a history of the Association of Heads of University Administration (AHUA), which adopted this title in 1994. It was previously called the Registrars' Conference and then Conference of Registrars and Secretaries (CRS).

Formation

In 1918, towards the end of the First World War, the government urged the university sector to establish a body for communication and consultation and the heads of universities began to meet regularly as a Standing Committee.^[1] In 1931 the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) was established on a formal basis. It was renamed as Universities UK in 2000. The University Grants Committee (UGC) was established in 1919 as the body responsible for the distribution of government grants. The National Union of Students was formed in 1922.^[2] It is probable that during the 1930s, in the wake of such developments, the then heads of administrative services, typically with titles of Registrar, or Secretary, or Registrar and Secretary, decided to establish a conference. A meeting described as 'Registrars' Conference' was held at King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne (now Newcastle University) on 31 March and 1 April 1939 (a Saturday), five months before the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe. It was attended by ten people representing seven different universities with apologies from two more. There were no introductory comments recorded in the minutes and it was agreed that the Conference should meet in Liverpool in 1940. This suggests that the 1939 Conference may not have been the first. During the 1980s and 1990s, the annual Conference papers routinely included a list of Conference venues. The list starts with the University of Bristol in 1946. Notwithstanding this, it is the case that the establishment of the Conference pre-dates World War II. A letter from George Grant, Registrar of the University of Birmingham, written in 1947 to the Registry of the University of Cambridge, notes "...before the war the registrars of the provincial

1 Dawson W.H. ed. *The Yearbook of the Universities of the Empire* (1922) pp.7–8

2 Armytage W.H.G. 'United Kingdom' pages 35–48 in Summary Record of Working Party on University Administrative Systems *The Administration of Universities* (International Association of Universities, Paris, 1967) pp.40–47

universities held informal conferences once a year. The conference has now been revived and the 1947 meeting was held in Birmingham."^[3] Grant was not appointed until 1941 and therefore would not have been that familiar with the pre-war activity. In the absence of further evidence, it is reasonable to date the origins of the AHUA to 1939.

3 1947 Cambridge archive
GBR/0265/UA/R242/A/1947/Box
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If this is the case, then much of the credit for the initiative should go to William Angus who chaired the 1939 meeting. He had become Registrar of Armstrong College in 1930, then the largest component of the federal University of Durham and the only part with full-time administrative staff. He was highly effective and well regarded even with his austere temperament. It was natural for him to become the Registrar of the University of Durham in 1938 even if, according to his successor, "...some abruptness of manner and an occasionally disconcerting directness saved him from universal popularity." Whilst at Durham he worked for two Vice-Chancellors and did not always see eye-to-eye with either.^[4] He became Secretary to the University of Aberdeen in 1952, a post he retained until 1967. Inevitably, he was referred to by his previous colleagues as "Aberdeen Angus" but not, I suspect, to his face.

4 Bettenson E. 'William S. Angus Obituary' pages 5-6 University of Durham Gazette volume XXVII (1983)

REGISTRARS' CONFERENCE
at King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne.

1st April, 1939

Present: Mr. W. S. Angus, Registrar of the University of Durham (in the Chair), Mr. D. J. Cameron, Registrar of the University of Birmingham, Mr. C. G. Burton, Secretary of the University of Birmingham, Mr. A. E. Wheeler, Registrar of the University of Leeds, Mr. S. Dumbell, Registrar of the University of Liverpool, Dr. N. Smith, Registrar of the University of Manchester, Mr. E. Smith, Registrar of the University of Reading and Mr. D. Brynmor Anthony, Registrar of the University of Wales.
Mr. W. N. Austin, Secretary to the Council of the Durham Colleges and Mr. W. G. B. Oliver, Registrar of King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne, were also present.

Apologies for absence were received from Miss W. Shapland, Registrar of the University of Bristol and Mr. W. M. Gibbons, Registrar of the University of Sheffield.

The universities represented in 1939 were Birmingham, Durham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Reading, and Wales with apologies from Bristol and Sheffield. This was all the universities in England, at that time except for Cambridge, Oxford, and London. A paper, written by William Angus and submitted to the 1962 Conference, noted in passing that the Conference began with eight provincial universities. These 'sister' universities, as the Registrar of the University of Sheffield described them, already had common interests and the desire to meet to discuss mutual administrative concerns was probably the key factor in the formation of the Conference.^[5] The 1918 Representation of the People Act, which gave the vote to nearly all adult men and most women over 30, also strengthened the system of university seats. The universities of Cambridge, London, Oxford, and the four Scottish universities already enjoyed the privilege of electing their own MPs. The 1918 franchise extension gave nearly all graduates a second vote in their university constituency and 12 university MPs continued to be elected until 1948 when the system was abolished. Two of these were elected for the combined constituency of the universities of Birmingham, Bristol, Durham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, and Sheffield (Reading was added in 1928). The graduates of the University of Wales and Queen's Belfast also elected one MP each from 1918. The administrative process for maintaining their part of the electoral register fell on each university and proved difficult. There were complaints in Parliament about the inability of the universities to estimate accurately the size of the electorate.^[6] Issues relating to the parliamentary constituency were discussed at the early Conferences alongside many other matters.

5 11 January 1946 Sheffield archive
GB / 3041 / US / REG / 1/ 139/65

6 *Hansard* 15 June 1928 vol.218
col.1364–1385

Some of the topics discussed in 1939 were to be echoed down the years: student health, 'foreign' students, admissions qualifications, and student fees. Others were very much of their time including the issue of student publications, where alarm was expressed about the emergence of cheaper periodicals appearing weekly or fortnightly. The general opinion was that such publications were undesirable. The discussion on air raid precautions concluded that it would be impossible to protect buildings, but blast and splinter protection could be provided for personnel.^[7]

7 1939 Durham archive UND/CB1/
A26

One of the two apologies to this meeting was from Winifred Shapland. In 1931 she had become the first woman Registrar in a UK university when appointed to the role at the University of Bristol. She served until 1950. Throughout the early decades of the Conference, the membership was overwhelmingly white male. This was not to change in any significant way until the 1990s and, even then, the glass ceiling was cracked not smashed. Universities were slow generally to implement progressive social policies for their staff. The 1963 Conference questionnaire collated information on maternity leave policies. The majority of institutions reported that they had no provision. The response from Durham was telling: "Question has never arisen". Nottingham was ahead of its time with the payment of full salary less maternity allowance for eight weeks and half salary for a further eight weeks. However, on her return the member of staff had to give an undertaking that "...adequate provision has been made for the care and welfare of the child so that the members can in fact give full-time service to the University." Reading had a similar approach.^[8] This was a different world.

8 1963 Durham archive UND/CB1/A26



Early years to 1980

I have not uncovered definitive evidence, but it is possible that after the 1940 meeting in Liverpool, which did go ahead, the Conference was suspended for the duration of the War and recommenced with the meeting in Bristol in 1946. On the recommendation of Angus, representatives from Cambridge, Oxford, and London attended their first Conference in 1948 held in Sheffield. It was agreed that “...in view of the large amount of business to be discussed...” a second less formal meeting than the 'Annual Conference' be held in September that year in Senate House in London.^[9] At that second meeting, consideration was given to the issue of inviting participation from Scottish universities.

The minutes record: “One or two Members thought that the invitation to the Scottish Universities would also make the Conference too large, and they were doubtful whether any useful knowledge could be either imparted or gained, as the administration of Scottish Universities differed a great deal from English and Welsh Universities.”

The matter was put to a vote, and it was agreed to invite Scottish universities to join together with Queen’s University Belfast.^[10] The Conference was hosted by the University of Edinburgh in 1950 and began meeting on weekdays. Post-War austerity was still in evidence. Delegates were housed in student rooms. Those visiting Queen’s Belfast in 1954 were requested to bring towel and soap.^[11]

Attendance at the Conference, which reverted back to a single meeting a year after 1949, was high with relatively few apologies to each meeting. Deputies were permitted but this remained unusual.

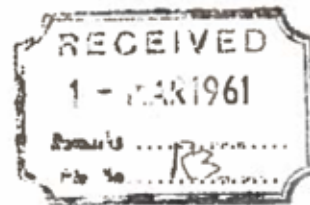
**CRS Dinner at Durham Castle,
April 1968**

9 1947 Cambridge archive
GBR/0265/UA/R242/A/1947/Box
42; 1948 Durham archive UND/
CB1/A26

10 1948 Durham archive UND/
CC2/318

11 1954 Cambridge archive
GBR/0265/UA/R242/B/1947/Box
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UNIVERSITY OF EXETER



21st February, 1961.

Dear Bettenson,

Conference of Registrars and Secretaries, 1961

I have pleasure in inviting you to attend the Conference to be held at Exeter on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday (April 10th - 12th). I shall be grateful if you will let me know, as soon as convenient, whether you are able to accept this invitation, and let me have items which you would like to be placed on the Agenda for the Conference.

Accommodation will be provided in Lopes Hall, St. German's Road, for the nights of the 10th and 11th. Perhaps you will let me know if you wish also to have accommodation reserved for the night of the 12th. The Conference itself will be held in Northcote House (our new Administration Building).

I hope that you will be able to arrive in time for tea (in Lopes Hall) on Monday, the 10th. The formal dinner will be held on Tuesday evening.

If the Conference is able to dispose of the items on the Agenda by lunch time on Tuesday, the afternoon will be free, and I suggest that there are so many attractions in this area that there is no need to 'organize' members. The City itself, though grievously damaged during the war, has still much to offer to anyone interested in buildings; the coast lies within easy distance; Dartmoor and Exmoor also are fairly close at hand for those with cars. There is, too, the University itself which many of you may not yet have seen and which you might like to inspect. I shall, of course, be happy to act as guide.

Lopes Hall is situated about half a mile from the main University site; given fine weather you might even enjoy the opportunity of walking to Northcote House. However, the Devon weather can be inclement and I must, therefore, consider the need to arrange transport. If a sufficient number will be coming by car - and would be prepared to use their cars (if necessary) - between Lopes Hall and Northcote House, there is no need for me to hire a coach for this purpose. Will you, therefore, in replying be good enough to let me know whether you will be coming by car?

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, likely belonging to the Secretary of the University.

Secretary of the University

E.M. Bettenson, Esq., M.A.,

In the early 1960s, the Conference discussed the implications of the impending expansion of the university sector. By 1962, there were 23 UK universities. Two members normally attended from London and two from Wales, so membership of the Conference was 25. In addition, the Secretary of the Association of Universities of the British Commonwealth was regularly invited alongside a small number of Registrars from overseas universities. Thirty delegates could be expected at any one venue. It was recognised that expanding the membership from this base would change the character of the Conference, requiring a more formal approach. At the 1961 Conference, William Angus was invited to produce a paper on the future organisation. He was able to present his paper to the 1962 Conference which was held at Aberdeen. The Conference confirmed that membership should be open to every university in the UK. The normal expectation was for each institution to be represented by just one person. The possibility of regional conferences was discussed, and it was thought that they could be held provided they did not distract from the main Conference. Crucially, it was agreed to establish a Steering Committee. It would have three members, the Chair of the preceding Conference, the Chair of the forthcoming Conference and the Chair of the subsequent Conference, with the power to co-opt further members.^[12]

12 1962 Durham archive UND/CB1/A26.

From the start of the Conference, the remits of its members varied, although there were some widespread common expectations. The Registrar or Secretary reported to the head of the university (Vice-

(5) Conduct of Business

It was agreed that in future a small committee should be appointed each year to arrange the preparation of the Conference agenda. This committee should consist of the Chairman of the preceding Conference, the Chairman of the forthcoming Conference and the Chairman of the subsequent Conference, with power to co-opt further members.

Chancellor was the most common title). Some led a unitary structure which covered all administrative services. Other universities had a separate senior officer, typically Bursar or Finance Officer, with responsibility for finance and estates, reporting independently to the Vice-Chancellor. The 'secretary' aspect of the role, often included in the title, referred specifically to the responsibility to act as clerk for the university's governing bodies – typically Council, Court, and

Senate – as defined in the statutes or other legal articles of governance. The name of the Conference changed from Registrars' Conference to the Conference of Registrars and Secretaries (CRS) in 1961. This does not appear to have been discussed and seems to have occurred because the host was Roderick Ross at the University of Exeter. He had been appointed as Registrar in 1952 but his own title was changed to Secretary in 1954 and he continued in this position until 1975.^[13]

13 University of Exeter Special Collections Roderick Ross, Registrar

Regardless of the specific title, acting as a confidential source of advice and support for the Vice-Chancellor was a core expectation of the role of Registrar or Secretary. Three key elements can be identified for CRS members which continue to be shared by AHUA members:

- management effectiveness in leading a significant portfolio of university services;
- advising the university's statutory bodies;
- advising the head of the institution and other senior officers.

Before the expansion of the higher education sector in the 1960s, the number of students in the university sector was small, around 118,000, and the number of administrators tiny.^[14] In 1953, there were around 400 administrative staff throughout the UK – although reports on numbers tended to exclude 'clerical' posts. By 1970, the comparable figure was around 1,900.^[15] The Registrar or Secretary in any one university would know all his or her administrative staff personally.

14 Anderson R. *Universities and Elites in Britain Since 1800* (Macmillan, London, 1992) p.26

15 Angus W.S. 'University Administrative Staff', *Public Administration*, 1973 p.24

The problem of undergraduate applicants applying to multiple universities and holding more than one offer was discussed in 1960.^[16] The CVCP had already established an ad hoc committee in 1957 to review this issue and a number of Registrars were heavily involved in the establishment of the Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA) in 1961 (reformed as the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, UCAS, in 1993).

16 1960 Cambridge archive GBR/0265/UA/R242/D/1947/Box 44

The annual conferences of the CRS were significant events. The files demonstrate the effort involved in the preparation and organisation of these conferences. They were used for the exchange of management information. From the Conference in 1951, it seems to have become regular practice to circulate questionnaires seeking information on specific topics that were to be discussed at the Conference. Many of the topics seem relatively minor matters of detail. The 1963 Conference included items on publicity for public lectures and payments for student demonstrators. In 1964, responses were sought on what information was held in student records, the ratio of secretarial to academic staff, the operation of telephone systems,

the appointment of supervisors for higher degrees, amongst many other matters.

In the world before email and the internet, there was no alternative to the dissemination of written information and a mass of paper was produced. Three separate questionnaires were circulated to members in advance of the 1968 Conference at the University of Durham. Registrars and Secretaries were asked to complete one on staff structures and send 65 copies to the Durham Registrar and Secretary for distribution at the Conference.^[17] The Steering Committee took responsibility for approving the list of items that were included in the questionnaires, amongst other administrative matters.

17 1968 Durham archive UND/CB1/R8b1

By 1965, it was acknowledged that the burden of collating the answers to the questionnaires had become extremely heavy and it was agreed that the Chair of the Conference would select not more than five of the questions submitted for universities to complete, although this was inconsistently applied. A decade later, it was agreed that even in its more limited form, the effort involved outweighed the benefit, especially since it was felt the responses lacked consistency and were open to interpretation. The use of the questionnaire faded out and the Conference agreed not to re-introduce it in 1979.^[18]

18 1979 Cambridge archive GBR/0265/UA/R242/G/1947/Box 45

A report from the Conference was submitted to the CVCP from the mid-1960s and this communication was welcomed by the CVCP. The Steering Committee took care not to tread on the toes of the CVCP. When planning the 1968 Conference, the three members decided to consult their Vice-Chancellors on whether to include a discussion on administrative staff structures including the basis of promotion since the CVCP had already given some consideration to these issues. The discussion went ahead, presumably after clearance had been given.^[19] This flags one of the enduring characteristics of CRS/AHUA – it was not an organisation that set out to circumvent neither the existing lines of responsibility within institutions or across the sector. Nor did it seek to grab headlines. Instead, it promoted quiet efficiency and the dissemination of best practice.

19 1967 Durham archive UND/CB1/R8a1

The Conference records show some problems are perennial. The fraudulent publication of degree certificates was a concern at the 1948 Conference. Student behaviour, and car parking both featured in 1962. Pressure to change the academic year from October–September to January–December was first acknowledged in 1965. Nearly all universities had considered the possibility and rejected it.

While most of the topics raised in these early conferences concerned specific administrative or legal procedures, for example over degree ceremonies or qualifications of academic staff, from the earliest days the Conference discussed and expressed opinions on wider strategic developments. International matters were not ignored. Representatives from the University of Adelaide and University College of the Gold Coast (now University of Ghana) both attended the 1949 Conference in London. It continued to be regular practice to have a small number of international visitors, typically from Commonwealth countries, attend each conference. There were Conferences of Registrars in Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and probably others.

The issue of training for new administrators was vexed. Amongst CRS members there were those who were a little dismissive of the benefits of any form of formal training, but this proved to be a minority view. The first general training course for university administrators was organised by CRS members and held in Edinburgh in 1964. Progress was a little erratic. The Steering Committee in 1967 expressed its support for the emerging Meeting of University Academic Administrative Staff (MUAAS). A cadre of administrators from the University of Manchester was central to the establishment of MUAAS in 1961. It was the start of an organisation to promote professional values amongst administrators and over time was renamed as the Conference of University Administrators (CUA 1973), the Association of University Administrators (AUA 1994), and, from 2023, the Association of Higher Education Professionals (AHEP).^[20] A number of Registrars served on the Administrative Training Committee established by the CVCP in 1970.^[21] There were regular business items on the progress of training provision throughout the late 1960s through to the 1980s at the meetings of the CRS. Similarly, frequent views were expressed over the development of national pay structures and career opportunities for administrators.

In 1965, the Conference again discussed the criteria for membership and agreed they did not need to adhere rigidly to the notion that only institutions that were members of CVCP could join. Instead, membership was extended to 22 University Colleges, mainly Colleges of Advanced Technology or members of the University of London or Wales. Prior to 1993, this was the single largest expansion of the Conference membership.

The growth in the sector and advances in technology, saw the Conference grappling with the early stages of computerisation during the 1960s. There were discussions over the national coordination

²⁰ Walsh J.J. '1961–1973 A time of Hope' pp.3–28 in Bosworth S. ed. *Beyond the Limelight, essays on the occasion of the silver jubilee of the Conference of University Administrators* (CUA, 1986)

²¹ Angus W.S. 'University Administrative Staff', *Public Administration*, 1973 p.37

of student records leading in 1964 to the formation of an informal working party to cooperate with the UGC and the Royal Statistical Society, both of which had already established working groups on the issue. In response to the questionnaire, most universities indicated that they did not use a computer in connection with student registration or timetabling, although Liverpool reported that "...the Faculty of Science is using, with success, an I.B.M. accounting machine and punched cards in connection with applications for admission into the Faculty."

Already by the early 1960s, management structures were changing. At the 1963 Conference, there was a report of the emergence of small policy committees to help manage the university. Their membership consisted of the Vice-Chancellor, the Pro-Vice-Chancellors, the Deans, and one or two other representatives. It was the start of an important change. Universities cherished their democratic forms of governance, and this created a heavy burden of servicing committees. The Registrar of the University of Manchester, Vincent Knowles, who contributed enormously to the development of administrative careers in universities, somewhat despaired at the amount of paperwork these democratic structures created. He reported that at Manchester there were 34 committees of Senate, 17 joint committees of Senate and Council, and 25 committees of Council. In addition, Senate was in the habit of creating ad hoc committees at every meeting which meant there were over 350 committee meetings a year to be serviced by the Registrar's small central administration. The situation was getting worse: the number of committees had more than doubled since 1945.^[22]

22 1963 Durham archive UND/CB1/A26

Throughout the early records of the CRS there are examples of an anti-competitive ethos, even with regard to the provision of external services. Dr Norman Smith, Registrar at the University of Manchester, reported to the 1939 Conference that their official robe maker was now subject to competition from other firms. The minutes drily note "Other Universities appear to have no such trouble".^[23] Some matters reflected the legal position of the time. The age of majority was 21 until 1969. This might explain why some universities made the addresses of students publicly available and Scottish universities sold registers of their graduates. Staff addresses too were made widely available in calendars or similar publications.^[24]

23 1939 Durham archive UND/CB1/A26

24 1962 Durham archive UND/CB1/A26

In addition to a series of meetings and discussions, the Conference programme included some cultural and social activities, a formal dinner (which was black tie until 2006), excursions, and opportunities for networking, not infrequently around the bar. The 1958 Conference

in Reading had its business meeting on a Tuesday morning before busing the delegates to visit the Atomic Energy Research Establishment, Harwell, returning them in time for sherry and the formal dinner. The 1976 Conference in Sheffield offered delegates a choice of visiting Haddon Hall, a stately home in Derbyshire, or Firth Brown, one of the largest steelworks in Sheffield – numbers were divided nearly evenly between the two attractions. It is reasonable to conclude that, despite the expansion of the university sector during the 1960s, CRS retained an almost club-like atmosphere. The membership was small, under 60. Registrars and Secretaries tended to serve for a long period of time and therefore knew each other well. They were overwhelmingly men with similar educational backgrounds. They went about their business with no intention of seeking publicity for the Conference. CRS transactions were generally cordial, although the occasional acerbic comment was captured in the minutes. Ernest Bettenson, (Registrar of the University of Durham 1952 then of University of Newcastle upon Tyne 1963–1976) expressed the view that the 1972 “...White Paper was like Mrs Thatcher (its author as Education Minister) – well set out and attractive, but somehow unlovable.”^[25]

25 1973 Cambridge archive
GBR/0265/UA/R242/F/1947/Box
45



The angst of the 1980s

By the start of the 1980s, CRS had become well-established. Five regional groups – Midlands, North (including Northern Ireland), Scotland, South, and Wales had been introduced from the late 1970s, each meeting once a term and feeding issues into the Steering Committee. These regional groups varied in their level of activity with the North group being especially active and organising its own one-day conference, and the Scottish group having particularly strong relations with Scottish Principals. Good working relations with the CVCP had been developed and CVCP representatives now frequently attended the annual conference. The CVCP 1982 Training Committee's *Information for University Administrators* described CRS as the co-ordinating body for issues of university management and the formal channel of communication with the CVCP on such matters.^[26]

Notwithstanding these foundations, not all members were sanguine about the position and role of CRS in the face of the management challenges and opportunities the newly elected Thatcher government seemed likely to create. There was a feeling amongst some members that the Conference had lost its way and did not have a sense of purpose and commitment. Stuart Bosworth, Registrar of the University of Salford, presented some concerns to the 1980 Conference. While recognising the value of sharing experiences with other individuals holding similar levels of responsibility, there needed to be greater opportunities to develop and extend the collective influence and expertise of the Conference.

CRS Conference at University of Bath, 1980

²⁶ CVCP *Information for University Administrators* (1982) pp.36–37

As a first step, greater use should be made of outside external expert speakers and sub-groups focusing on specific issues. The Conference agreed to some immediate changes: to enlarge the Steering Committee by adding representatives from the regional groups and appoint a Business Secretary to serve for a two-year period. This revised Steering Committee would come to see itself as a continuing presence of the collective group of Registrars and Secretaries rather than a small group putting together a conference programme, although this still featured.

The first requirement of the new Business Secretary was to review and improve the organisation and operation of the Conference. Also, to review the Conference's external and internal relations. Dr Herbert Burchnall, Registrar of the University of Liverpool since 1962, was appointed as the first Business Secretary.^[27] His proposals were accepted in 1981 for the Conference to invite a guest speaker of distinction, have both group sessions and plenary sessions on topics of importance, and close with a business session. Thus, the 1981 Conference at Heriot-Watt adopted a broad structure that would become familiar to all subsequent members and continue through to today. The Conference confirmed that it would continue to invite representatives from the CVCP, UGC, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, guests from European countries, and visiting Registrars and Secretaries from Commonwealth countries. During the 1980s a representative from the German Kanzlers (the closest organisation to the CRS in Germany) was frequently in attendance. The Business Secretary continued to be elected by the full Conference, to serve for a period of two years.

27 1980 Durham archive UND/CB1/
R8 1ii

The 1981 Conference eventually adopted a twofold strategy for its development:

- to discuss problems of university management;
- “to discuss, from time to time, fundamental revisions to the traditional concepts of the management of university resources of all kinds”.



Photograph shows, from left to right and front to back:

SR Bosworth, Salford
 JG Thomas, Wales
 AB Riddell, York
 A Davies, Swansea, Wales
 DI Cameron, Heriot-Watt
 HH Burchnall, Liverpool
 JFN Hodgkinson, Keele
 A Plumb, Nottingham
 C Challis, CVCP
 A Christodoulou, ACU
 I Bender, Trier, Germany
 F Harris-Jones, UWIST, Wales
 LA Moritz, Cardiff, Wales
 CAT Rowe-Evans, Warwick
 G Declercq, Leuven, Belgium
 OM Trovik, Oslo, Norway
 LJ Kail, Surrey
 K Knight, Sydney, Australia
 GS Horner, Bath
 AL Pritchard, Deakin, Australia
 J Pike, LSE, London
 EC Wright, Bristol
 P Taylor, LSE, London
 B H Taylor, CVCP
 WT Ewing, Ulster
 J J Walsh, Leeds
 R Seaton, Dundee
 RG Topping, Queen's Belfast
 LA Fairbairn, City
 DWJ Morrell, Strathclyde
 GM Cockburn, Lancaster

J Dukes, HEA Dublin
 MGE Paulson-Ellis, East Anglia
 GG Williams, Queen Mary, London
 PF Vowles, London
 RG Hutchings, London
 D Neave, Brunel
 FT Mattison, Hull
 GE Chandler, Essex
 TA Owen, Aberystwyth, Wales
 RE Macpherson, Cambridge
 SA Rayner, Queensland, Australia
 DH McWilliam, UMIST
 TR Saunders, WNSM, Wales
 MA Baatz, Leicester
 J McCargow, Glasgow
 E Hughes, Bangor, Wales
 WR Andrew, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
 DA Schofield, Southampton
 A J Dorey, Oxford
 RG Bomont, Stirling
 JF Johnson, Reading
 FL Roberts, Loughborough
 IM Sanderson, Bradford
 G Lockwood, Surrey
 HF Patterson, King's, London
 KN Houghton, Aston
 WRG Lewis, Birmingham
 AM Currie, Edinburgh
 FJ Orton, Sheffield

CRS Conference at Heriot-Watt, 1981

Participants not in photograph

GK Caston, CVC
 KE Kitchen, Manchester
 TB Skinner, Aberdeen

It decided to reject the recommendation to promote joint meetings with finance officers' and building officers' conferences to discuss general problems of university management. Nor did it support the proposal to broaden the membership of the Conference but, if the Registrar or Secretary could not attend, then they could be represented by a senior deputy. It did, though, support moves to establish stronger links with the CUA.^[28] This resulted in the establishment of a joint CUA/CRS International Committee, from 1983, to promote opportunities for administrators to benefit from international study trips and similar events.^[29] The Chair of the CUA was invited to the annual conference from 1985.

28 1981 Durham archive UND/CB1/R8 1ii

29 1981 Durham archive UND/CB1/R8 1ii

As soon as the reforms of spring 1980 and spring 1981 were agreed, they may have looked inadequate in the light of the storm that was to rock the sector. The UGC's Grant Letters for 1981–1982, dated 1 July 1981, announced significant and differential cuts in student numbers and recurrent funding grants for universities. It came as a terrible shock to the university sector which had grown use to relatively benign government funding settlements since 1945. Cuts ranged from 6% at York to a swingeing 44% at Salford.^[30] Amongst Registrars and Secretaries, the debate about the resulting organisational challenges continued over the next decade. Bosworth's paper *Future of the Registrars' Conference: Managerial role of Registrars and Secretaries*, considered in 1982, acknowledged that a key constraint for CRS was the desire to avoid treading on the toes of the CVCP, but suggested that the work of the CVCP could be improved by the greater involvement of other university staff in the development of policies.

30 Shattock M. *Making Policy in British Higher Education 1945–2011* (Open University Press, 2012) pp.126–130



CRS Conference at University of Surrey in 1983

More horizon-scanning can be identified in CRS's discussions during the 1980s than previously. William Waldegrave, then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department of Education and Science, predicted merges across the so-called binary line, between universities and polytechnics, within the following ten years, when he spoke to the Conference in 1983.

Despite the changes to enhance the strategic aspects of Conference business, the Conference continued to intertwine more traditional elements into its proceedings. A 'Spouses' Programme', occasionally referred to as 'Ladies' Programme', was in place. Some of these arrangements seem strange from the perspective of the third decade of the 21st century, including the separate entertainment of spouses on the evening of the Conference dinner, a practice continued until 1986.



The Thatcher government's criticisms of the governance and management of universities, the cuts to public funding, and the challenges to improve efficiency, created in 1985–1986 what was described as a “hyperactive year” for CRS trying to adapt to the new more volatile climate.^[31] The Jarratt Report (1985) on management efficiency prompted a special meeting of CRS. The proposed governance changes to enhance the power of Council as the governing body of a university and recognise the Vice-Chancellor as the Chief Executive Officer, may seem relatively mild today, but the evidence collated by CRS members pointed to the core of the problem. While most lay members of governing bodies were generally enthusiastic, many senior academic members gave a cautious reaction. CRS members were also somewhat divided with many wary about the wave of managerial change sweeping the sector.

CRS Conference at University of Bradford in 1985

31 1986 Durham archive UND/CB1/R8 2ii

The 1985 Conference papers record, “One Registrar pointed out that his Senate was now weak in managerial skills – the elder statesmen had already taken early retirement.”^[32] It is difficult to imagine a time when a Senate was ever strong in managerial skills. Geoff Lockwood, Registrar of the University of Sussex (1973 to 1996), was a member of the Jarratt Committee but others were critical of the proposals. The Registrar of the University of Leeds, Jim Walsh, who had been a colleague of Lockwood when they had both been administrators at Manchester, was especially outspoken, warning members that he would oppose any attempt to turn the Conference into a kind of “Jarratt Enforcement” agency and distributing a criticism of the proposals under the title “A Load of Old Cobblers?”^[33] Most Registrars at the time tended to be more restrained in their language.

32 1985 Durham archive UND/CB1/R8 1

33 1985 Cambridge archive GBR/0265/UA/R242/H/1947/Box 46

During the second half of the 1980s, some of the assumptions that had been commonly held by CRS members continued to fragment. The tradition of a civil service type role for the administration was challenged by the more hostile conditions faced by universities. Some members argued that they were now university managers not university administrators. Jarratt had advocated a more business-like approach to university management and CRS responded. Universities could no longer be managed by consent alone. The 1987 spring Conference unanimously declared agreement that training should be given a high priority and there should be an enhanced role for Secretaries and Registrars as managers within institutions.^[34] There was also agreement that a mid-term conference, held in September, should become a permanent fixture of the calendar alongside the annual or spring conference.^[35]

34 1987 Durham archive UND/CB1/R8 2i

35 Report from Business Secretary March 1988 Durham archive UND/CB1/R8 2i

Training or staff development, as it was increasingly being called, for administrators at all levels continued as an important topic with CRS working well with CUA and the Universities’ Staff Development and Training Unit, established in 1988. CRS called for the CVCP to establish a Board of Studies with responsibility for developing a formal national training programme at its September Conference 1990. Although this did not happen, it was a recognition of the need to adopt a different approach.



**CRS Conference at
City University in 1986**

A special meeting in Birmingham in 1987 considered a paper from the second Business Secretary, Alex Currie, Secretary of the University of Edinburgh, on the future role of Registrars and Secretaries and the development of CRS. He identified a number of common aspects of the work of members of CRS:

- wide ranging duties covering the academic and business side of the university;
- close contact with the head of the institution;
- overall University 'remembrancer';
- intermediary between the senior constitutional bodies and the students.

This enabled CRS to be a communications network on general university policy and this raised the question of whether CRS should seek to increase its national profile.

There was a challenge from Mike Shattock, Registrar of the University of Warwick, who had hosted a successful conference only three years previously. He argued that CRS was an organisation looking for a role. For CRS to be effective, stronger and more permanent apparatus would be required to support its work. He floated the idea of paying for administrative support, maybe on a part-time basis from a recently retired colleague, to work with the Business Secretary. This would require the introduction of an institutional subscription, not just Conference attendance fee.

Currie's paper quoted extensively from correspondence with Shattock and also argued for the need to strengthen the CRS structure. He maintained the CRS was valued by the CVCP and had developed good relations with the Department for Education and Science. He accepted that the ad-hoc approach to the secretariat of CRS made the organisation less pro-active than it should be. Shattock proposed that CRS should work with the CVCP to provide an advisory service to universities on administrative/professional/technical matters. He stressed the role was to support the CVCP and not to emulate it. But at this stage these bold ideas were not acted upon.

Another, equally sensitive issue, was identified – the cases where Registrars and Secretaries took early retirement in difficult circumstances. Should CRS provide some sort of support for its individual members? The difficulties were obvious. The argument went that CRS was a 'professional association' and as such should listen to the concerns of its fellow professionals. It was suggested that a small panel could be formed to advise individuals, and this might include legal advice. This initiative does not seem to have been developed.

At this stage, all the efforts to maintain CRS were carried out on a voluntary basis in addition to the considerable demands of the Registrar or Secretary role at the home institution. Since there was no dedicated support, it is not surprising that some of the decisions made by the Conference failed to be implemented consistently as responsibility for the organisation passed from venue to venue. In 1982, the Conference agreed to invite Registrars-designate to attend, but this does not appear to have been sustained. Some changes were implemented, and the Steering Committee was more active. In addition to regular meetings with the CVCP, a number of CRS interest groups had been formed including those on Performance Indicators, a Forum on Commercial Activities, and a joint group with CUA on Legal Matters.

By the late 1980s, the Steering Committee was meeting at least twice a year with the Executive Committee of the newly formed British Universities Finance Officers Representative Group (BUFORG subsequently renamed British Universities Finance Directors Group – BUFDG), a reversal of the 1981 decision. Combined responses were on occasions submitted to various UGC policy proposals. Some wanted to go further and merge with the Finance Officers. Although discussions continued, the general mood within CRS was not to seek a merger with the Finance Officers.

There was a further opportunity to create a new sector-wide body. Lord Flowers, Rector of Imperial College, and Chair of CVCP, was asked to undertake a review of its activities. CRS urged the development of an Association of British Universities by broadening the CVCP membership to include Chairs of Council, other senior lay officers, Registrars, Secretaries, and Finance Officers. The Flowers Review of 1988 encouraged the CVCP to become a more pro-active body with a director general, but the Association proposal was not adopted by CVCP on the basis that it would be unwieldy. ^[36]

36 1988 Durham archive UND/CB1/R8 2i; 26–27 September 1990
CVCP report AHUA office records

Perhaps as a response, CRS again considered extending its membership to other ‘first-tier officers’ – managers who reported directly to the head of the institution. Opinion was split – the recommendation from the Business Secretary, not supported by the full Steering Committee, was to permit Registrars and Secretaries to nominate one other member if they so wished. There were problems with this. The person nominated by a Registrar or Secretary may not themselves have been a first-tier officer and the proposal was not adopted at the Salford Conference in 1989.



CRS Conference at University of Salford in 1989

Another anxiety was the proliferation of specialist groups in the sector. Some 27 such groups were identified, many of which continue in various forms today. The Steering Committee acknowledged at the Birmingham Conference in 1987 that it was not possible to ‘control’ this development and CVCP was aware of the risks. Privately, the Steering Committee was concerned that the “CRS should be seen to be the most senior and the most influential of the various inter-university organisations of administrators.”^[37]

37 10 May 1989 AHUA office records

The CVCP did indeed share some of these concerns. Its Secretary floated the idea that it might perform a tighter co-ordinating role within the sector in a paper to the main committee in September 1990. The CVCP perceived a tendency for these specialist groups to brief the media and appear to speak on behalf of the university system.^[38] This led to a series of meetings with the representatives of CRS, AUA, BUFORG, and the Association of University Building Officers. The CRS Steering Committee welcomed the idea of tighter co-ordination of specialist sector-wide groups. This involved a list of organisations over which CRS would be given specific oversight responsibilities. However, the resources required to facilitate a coordinating role proved to be a stumbling block.^[39] For its part, CVCP was willing to explore how CRS and other bodies could work more effectively with the CVCP but dismissed the suggestion that it should provide secretarial support to CRS.^[40] There was an attempt to ensure the specialist groups did not publicly advocate policies which had not been approved by the CVCP or CRS via a *University Administrative Organisations – Code of Practice*. Reports from specialist groups were presented to the CRS Steering Committee for a while.^[41] The administrative effort to maintain such a system would have been significant and the practice lapsed.

38 26–27 September 1990 & letter 5 July 1990 from Secretary CVCP AHUA office records

39 17 March 1991 paper by Business Secretary AHUA office records

40 26 June 1990 Steering Committee AHUA office records

41 9 May 1991 Steering Committee AHUA office records

The anxiety about the role of CRS came to a head again at the September 1989 Conference in Stirling. The Steering Committee produced an important paper on the future direction of the Conference. It invited members to take a final decision on this matter and agree that it should not be raised again for at least three years. This was to prove a forlorn hope. Members had been invited to submit views in advance and there were a wide range of ideas for change. The problem was summed up in a paper presented by Frank Mattison, Registrar of the University of Hull. He feared that without change to respond to the new management environment created by Jarratt, and the rise of specialist groups with particular expertise, the “...CRS role would essentially be that of an annual dining club and meeting of colleagues.” He went on, “CRS is an organisation that hibernates for 51 weeks of the year. There is little dialogue between the regional groups that meet once a term and the Steering Committee.” For CRS, and perhaps for the higher education sector as a whole, the 1980s turned into a decade of self-reflection and a degree of self-recrimination.

CRS is an organisation that hibernates for 51 weeks of the year. There is little dialogue between the regional groups that meet once a term and the Steering Committee.

Frank Mattison, Registrar of the University of Hull

For the Steering Committee, changes in administrative structures, with some institutions challenging the notion of the Registrar as “primus inter pares”, the development of a body of Chairs of Councils (the Committee of University Chairs, CUC) as a national body wishing to play a bigger role, and increasing competitive behaviour between universities, all added to the mix. The special relationship between the Registrar and Vice-Chancellor, often reflected in the statutes of a university, was both “...a source of strength and an inhibitor for the work of the Conference.” The Committee’s overall response remained cautious. It proposed that the Conference should have three core purposes:

- mutual support for members by providing a forum for the exchange of information on management development and national policies;
- support the effective and efficient operation of universities;
- support universities in influencing government policies for higher education.

It advocated increasing the Conference’s public role and forming more special sub-groups to help promote its work. It came out against reforming the membership of the Conference, which retained a basic rule of one member per institution. It accepted that the name ‘Conference’ was unhelpful, and ‘Association’ was more attractive except for the resulting acronym – ARS. It was essential to align the Conference with the work of the CVCP and other groups but did not support merger with the Finance Officers.



Crossing the binary line 1991–1993

By the early 1990s, it was apparent that the abolition of the binary line was likely. CRS had discussed co-operation with polytechnics at its Conference in 1971. The Secretaries of Polytechnics had formed a Committee with a constitution which met twice a year and requested a formal link with CRS. The general view was that a formal arrangement was premature, but an informal liaison group should be established. The following year, the Conference rejected a request from the Polytechnic Secretaries to exchange observers at their mutual conferences and instead preferred discussions over common problems to take place at local or regional levels.^[42] These matters rested. In 1986 CRS produced a useful report on the general state of collaboration between higher education institutions concluding that “...substantial collaboration exists across the binary line”.^[43] The Steering Committee in 1989 recommended exploratory talks with the Conference of Polytechnic Secretaries (COPS) and a strengthening of ties if changes to the higher education environment justified it.

The Further and Higher Education Act 1992 finally converted the polytechnics into universities leading to the single biggest planned expansion of the university sector. In that year, the spring Conference in Newcastle considered the implications of the abolition of the binary line. The proposal to merge with COPS was not rejected but not strongly supported either and the Steering Committee was asked to consider the issue. Part of the caution related to the different

CRS Conference at University of Newcastle in 1992

⁴² 1972 Cambridge archive GBR/0265/UA/R242/F/1947/Box 45

⁴³ Cambridge archive GBR/0265/UA/R242/H/1947/Box 46

management structures in many polytechnics with few understood to have a direct equivalent of a traditional University Registrar. It was possible that a closer fit would be with the Deputy Directors (Academic) Group, known as the 'Chudley' Group. ^[44] Discussions were undertaken both with the Chudley Group and COPS.

44 20 August 1992 report from Business Secretary AHUA office records

The talks with the Chudley Group floated the idea of merger into a new organisation with each university having two members, one on the administrative side and one on the academic policy side. For the pre-1992 universities this would have meant a Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Registrar or Secretary. In total the new organisation would have had about 200 individual members, which many felt was too large. Initially, the Steering Group was inclined towards merger with the Chudley Group members but at the September 1992 Conference in Bath, John Lauwerys, then Secretary and Registrar at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, and shortly to become Secretary and Registrar at the University of Southampton, expressed concern and felt the Polytechnic Secretaries would be the closest fit. Others remained concerned that Polytechnic Secretaries had a narrower remit than most Registrars. A little despairingly, the discussion at the plenary session Newcastle Conference had concluded:

What was clear from discussions was that what unified Secretaries and Registrars as a single coherent group was most unclear! In some cases the representative on CRS was not even Secretary to the governing body.

It is worth considering why the abolition of the binary line proved to be so challenging for CRS to navigate. The position of Registrars and Secretaries in 1993 was neatly set out in a letter from the Business Secretary, Ken Kitchen, Registrar of the University of Manchester, dated 7 January. Of the 45 universities which were members of CVCP before the expansion in 1993, all but one had a Registrar or Secretary (that one exception was then Queen's Belfast). The position was one of a very small number defined in the Charter and Statutes. Generally, the Registrar or Secretary was the second highest paid officer after the Vice-Chancellor. Most universities had a unitary structure making the Registrar the single most senior administrative officer responsible directly to the Vice-Chancellor and the trend was towards an increasing number of universities adopting a unitary approach as opposed to a binary system with the Finance Officer being of equal status. In short, the polytechnic structure with more deputy directors could appear threatening to the position of the traditional Registrar.

For their part, the COPS annual conference held in December 1992 unanimously agreed to continue to meet until a new organisation was formed and decided to rename their group University Secretaries Group. It put forward proposals to merge with CRS with terms of reference for a new body and suggested that membership should be open to all those who were secretary or clerk to the governing body.^[45]

45 17 December 1992 Letter from Chairman of USG to Business Secretary CRS

The CVCP added further pressure. It advised that the deadline for the incorporation of the new universities into the CVCP was 1 April 1993 and urged all university administrative organisations to follow suit and to have acted within this timescale.^[46]

46 16 June 1992 letter from CVCP to Business Secretary AHUA office records

The CRS Steering Committee had intended that the new universities would be represented at the 1993 annual conference held in April. But, given the difficulties over merger with the Deputy Directors or Secretaries, this now looked in doubt. To settle the matter, a special CRS Conference was convened on 28 January 1993 at the London School of Economics. It considered the Steering Committee's unanimous preference to merge with the Chudley Group to form a new organisation with each university having two representatives. It sparked a lengthy debate, and a show of hands indicated a four to one majority opposed the Steering Committee's preference. Most CRS members wanted to retain only one representative from each university. Instead of a merger with the Secretaries or the Chudley Group, a letter was sent to the Vice-Chancellors of the 39 new universities on 19 March explaining the work of CRS and the difficulty of identifying an equivalent officer to the Registrar or Secretary in the management structure of most new universities. CRS was keen to form a new organisation of senior managers immediately below the level of Vice-Chancellor who had "...legal and managerial responsibilities across a wide span of the affairs of their institutions." CRS was aware that further changes would be required, including a new name. It asked each Vice-Chancellor "...to nominate one of your Deputies to help form the new Conference." The main purposes of CRS were listed as:

- "to provide a forum for development of effective management in universities;
- to share experience and encourage 'best practice';
- to support and encourage appropriate training for managerial and administrative staff;
- to consider matters of national policy in respect of higher education insofar as they affect the management of universities;
- to provide appropriate support for the CVCP."

The immediate responses were a bit mixed. Professor Mike Fitzgerald, Vice-Chancellor of Thames Valley University, whilst welcoming the attempts to create a new network, did not think this one would be workable. He explained “...we don’t actually have anyone who has similar responsibilities to those which the CRS represents.”^[47] However, many responded positively to the invitation and 22 made immediate nominations. Most nominees had the title Secretary or Registrar or a combination of the two, but there were a small number of Directors with various remits and three Pro-Vice-Chancellors. The decision not to merge with the Chudley Group, came as a disappointment to members of that group which decided to form a new sector-wide organisation concerned primarily with academic policy. It seems to have gone down better with the Secretaries, many of whom had been nominated.

47 29 March 1993 AHUA office records



The first national conference incorporating the new universities was held at King’s College in April 1993 with Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, Chancellor of the University of London, presiding at the Conference dinner. This was still under the name of the Conference of Registrars and Secretaries. Some 21 representatives of new universities attended alongside 49 from the pre-1992 sector. There was an unusually large number of sponsors (14) including Protective Security Systems Ltd and Courage Ltd (Brewers) – who provided a small donation of beer. The total income from the sponsors was £10,680, which covered a third of the conference costs. As the Business Secretary was pleased to report to the CVCP, “...CRS is clearly becoming a trans binary group...” – good to know.^[48]

48 14 July 1993 letter AHUA office records

The issue of further reforms including the name for the enlarged organisation was considered at the September 1993 meeting in Birmingham. Discussions with the Chudley Group had led to a suggestion of 'Conference of University Academic and Resource Managers' – which has all the hallmarks of design by committee.

^[49] There were plenty of alternatives floated including the dire 'Universities Corporate Management Conference'. The Birmingham Conference agreed that the Chair of the Steering Committee should no longer be the annual Conference host but be chosen by the Committee and a modest institutional fee, not just conference attendance fee, should be introduced. The Steering Committee subsequently unanimously agreed in June 1994 that Ian Powell, Registrar and Secretary of the University of Exeter, should become the first Chair of the expanded group.^[50] As the Business Secretary informed the CVCP Secretary in October 1993, all but three universities had been recruited and "...I am confident that the organisation can begin to look at what it can do for the system rather than continually contemplating itself!"^[51]

49 Note for the meeting of the Steering Committee held on 18 December 1992

50 16 June 1994 Steering Committee AHUA office records

51 Letter by Business Secretary 14 October 1993 office records

Association of Heads of University Administration: a row by any other name 1994–1996

This just left the tricky issue of the name. After a lengthy debate, a straw poll showed strong support for 'Association of University Heads of Administration', or perhaps 'Association of Heads of University Administration' as the Business Secretary later put it, but it was agreed to consult both regional groups and the CVCP.^[52] As events turned out, the Conference was right to proceed carefully. No objection was made to the proposed name by the associations of Finance Officers, Personnel Officers, or Estates Officers, but the formulation in the title including the words 'Heads of University' trod too close to the role assumed by a Vice-Chancellor over-sensitive to such semantics.

A number of Vice-Chancellors were unhappy with the new title partly on the grounds that they regarded themselves as the head of the administration.^[53] Professor David Johns, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bradford, was the most active in his opposition. He claimed that other senior administrators were concerned by the

52 1993 Birmingham AHUA, letter by Business Secretary 14 October 1993 office records

53 19 September 1994 Steering Committee AHUA office records

assumption of supremacy implied by the AHUA title. He canvassed all other Vice-Chancellors inviting them to vote on whether they approved of the title or not.^[54] His suggested alternative was the boring and misleading 'Association of Senior University Administrators'. CRS had informed the CVCP that it was conscious of the need to choose a title acceptable to the CVCP and was willing to change if a majority or even a significant number of Vice-Chancellors wanted them to do so.^[55] It was reported that in response to Professor Johns' survey, a quarter of Vice-Chancellors wanted to see the name changed. The CRS Steering Committee agreed to stick to its preferred new name and this decision was endorsed at the conference in September 1994. The matter lingered on until February 1995 when the main committee of the CVCP decided to take no further action.^[56]

54 Canvas by Professor Johns 7 November 1994 AHUA office records

55 CVCP Council meeting 21 October 1994 AHUA office records

56 Steering Committee 3 March 1995 AHUA office records

Although the dispute blew over, it was a disappointing start given the efforts over the decades for CRS to maintain close and harmonious relations with the CVCP, which it always acknowledged as the premiere policy-forming body in UK higher education.

The conference in Bangor 1994 confirmed that membership should be one member per institution and the institution must have university status. It also confirmed the institutional subscription for all members. AHUA would in the future have a level of income which had not been available to CRS. AHUA had eventually emerged but given the difficulties it is quite possible that the organisation could have folded in the early 1990s.

Despite the organisational angst, the early pattern of activity of AHUA conformed closely with that which had been established by CRS, with an annual or spring conference around Easter and a shorter mid-term conference in September. The conference programmes continued to include a list of previous venues dating back to 1946. The regional structure and Steering Committee were largely maintained although the South group was now divided into South, South West, and South East. The conference programme continued with its mix of guest speakers and working sessions. The social aspects of the conference were retained and some would say enhanced by the addition of a golf session – mercifully optional – although the Spouses' or Partners' programme was dropped in 1997. The 1995 conference in Aberdeen attracted sponsorship from eight different organisations including three different distilleries.

The new organisation worked well. Liaison with the CVCP over a wide range of policy issues continued. By the start of 1996, Cranfield University was the only British university not to be a member (later

corrected). There is no indication of any lingering difficulties over membership. Ian Miller, Secretary and Registrar of Napier University, became the first Chair from a post-1992 university in 1996 and the first annual conference held at a post-1992 university was at the University of Wolverhampton in the same year with the strapline title *The Future of Higher Education: Longer-Term Strategies*.

The abolition of the binary line led to a new emerging set of divisions between universities in the 1990s as universities sought to position themselves with similar institutions. The rise of the sector groups – the Russell Group (large research-led), 1994 Group (smaller research-led), Coalition of Modern Universities (mainly post-1992 universities), and other groupings over time – had the potential to destabilise sector-wide bodies such as AHUA by appealing to a smaller sub-set of members. But the AHUA records do not indicate that the operation of the sector-groups undermined the work of AHUA. Members still found benefit in discussing policies and practices across the whole sector. The Chairs and Executive Committee members of AHUA have continued to be drawn from a wide range of universities with no apparent leaning in any particular direction.

It says something about the strength of the basic concept of heads of professional services (as they would shortly begin to be described) meeting together to address matters of common concern. So, despite all the criticisms, the traumas over membership were quickly overcome after the expansion took place.

From Conference to Association 1996–2000

Despite the changes in the early 1990s, continuity with the CRS was the main characteristic of the AHUA during its early years. This changed in the second half of the decade. There were probably two reasons: the external environment and the internal pressures. The Dearing Committee Review of Higher Education, published in 1997, signalled a need to expand higher education provision. Its chapter on management and governance opened with the statement “The effectiveness of any organisation depends in the long term upon the effectiveness of its management and the arrangements for its governance.” (15.3). It called for the better management of resources and further changes to governance arrangements. It noted that “A relatively small proportion of higher education staff is designated as being in management compared to the nation as a whole.” (3.32) It reflected the concerns of more junior administrators about a lack of career progression opportunities and the low regard in which administrative support functions were held. (3.46) This was both a challenge and invitation to AHUA to act. But internally AHUA was still constrained by the resources available and its own structure.

Steps were taken to enhance the organisational effectiveness. A constitution was agreed in 1997. The Steering Committee was relabelled Executive Committee and the Business Secretary became an Executive Secretary from 1998. *Conference Organisation Notes for Guidance* were produced and a logo introduced. It is a salutary reminder of the challenges of communication before the near universal introduction of email and mobile phones that conference organisers were reminded of the need to provide “...an efficient message-taking service as delegates will be called urgently by their offices and need to ring back.”

Regular meetings with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), a successor body to the UGC, were in place by the late 1990s. Individual heads of administration were regularly appointed to various national working groups and were able to provide appropriate feedback to AHUA on developments. The AHUA struck up a productive relationship with the Chairs of University Councils (CUC). The first Secretary to the CUC was Mike Shattock, who helped facilitate communications between the two organisations. It was expected that a member of AHUA would succeed him in that role and in 2000 it was agreed to co-opt the Secretary to CUC to the Executive Committee of AHUA – an arrangement that continues.^[57]

The Executive Committee considered it necessary to improve the profile of the AHUA and speak publicly on some of the issues facing the sector. To do this, it was considered necessary for the Chair to be elected by the full membership for a three-year term and be eligible for re-election for a further three years. Various standing groups were introduced covering governance, staff development, staff matters, and student matters. Further, the Executive Committee was enlarged by the election of additional members as well as the regional convenors.

There needs to be full acknowledgement of AHUA’s regional structure. Most members of AHUA engage with the organisation through these groups which typically meet three times a year. This history inevitably concentrates on the national developments, but this can obscure the importance of the network which has formed the backbone of AHUA for many years.



An AHUA logo was introduced in 1998, alongside the *Conference Organisation Notes for Guidance*.

⁵⁷ Executive Committee 24 March 2000 AHUA office records

Crucially, the business support also needed to be strengthened. A number of ideas were considered including seconding an administrator.^[58] Eventually, in 2000 it was agreed to appoint a career administrator to provide full-time professional support for the Association, with an increase in the annual subscription to cover the extra cost. The issue of location and method of employment was also considered. The Chair since 1998 was Eddie Newcomb, Registrar and Secretary of the University of Manchester. This was particularly fortuitous. Manchester had provided a base for the AUA since its foundation. It provided accommodation and employed the staff, being recompensed by the organisation. The Executive Committee decided that an identical model would be appropriate.

58 Executive Committee 3 March 2000 AHUA office records



The AHUA logo developed into something like what we have today, in 2000.

The AHUA into the 21st Century

With the reforms undertaken during Eddie Newcomb's period as Chair, the AHUA entered into both a new century and a new era in its own development. The 'formation' of AHUA in 1994 had, in the end, been little more than a change of title from CRS and an expansion. The pattern of activity remained essentially unaltered. It was only in the late 1990s that a new business model was adopted, one that placed greater emphasis on the Executive rather than the annual meetings of the full Association. A similar process of change was followed by the CVCP which was rebranded as Universities UK (UUK) in 2000.

Briefing meetings were put in place with the Department of Education and Science. The AHUA's liaison with other groups including UUK, BUFDG, and AUA continued but key individuals from partner organisations were now regularly invited to Executive Committee meetings to discuss matters in a semi confidential environment. Senior representatives from the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), UUK, and others were now regular attendees. On the initiative of AHUA, a Higher Education Senior Managers' Forum was established in 2001 bringing together the Chairs and other officers of five other senior professional groups together with UUK. It represented a desire to be more pro-active than reactive in dealing with issues. It also partly reflected a move by UUK to become more of a lobbying body rather than providing a range of administrative support activities which had been a characteristic of the CVCP.^[59]

59 25 June 2002 HESMF minutes
AHUA office records

Similarly, whereas previously the AHUA Executive Committee had an administrative oversight role, it was now able to spend more time helping to influence national approaches. This was possible thanks to the improved capacity of administrative support available.

The first Executive Officer was appointed in 2001, Jeremy Hoad, and this support proved crucial to the development and maintenance of an effective organisation. Jeremy left in 2005 and Mike Littlewood (former Academic Registrar at the University of Manchester) filled the gap on a part-time basis until a new permanent appointment could be made – Catherine Webb in 2006. It was with Catherine’s invaluable support that the Chairs and the Executive Committee have been able to undertake their roles and ensure the organisation has continued to flourish despite the strains in the higher education sector. Catherine has decided to retire in 2024 and will be greatly missed. As the organisation grew, further professional support has been provided in the office by Tracey Murray (Administrator) and Tamsin Dyson (Media and Communications Officer). The professional support enabled a great deal but the success of AHUA depended on the willingness of individual members to give up their time and apply their management expertise for the benefit of the sector. This, of course, remains the case.

A strategic or business plan was first introduced in 2005 setting out objectives and resources available. In the constitution of that year the object of the Association was now simply defined as:

...to advance education for the public benefit by fostering the development of and means to achieve good leadership, management and governance in higher education by education, training and other means.

Email discussion groups were established and, after some delay, a web site was put in place during 2006. Membership was now open to a maximum of two individuals from each member institution. The expectation remained that the individuals should report directly to the Vice-Chancellor or equivalent. The posts of Deputy Chair, Honorary Secretary, and Honorary Treasurer were put in place. The Executive continued to include all the convenors of the regional groups, three to five elected members, and a representative of CUC. There were further revisions to the regional structure with the South now reunited as one group, but London formed its own group.

The organisation of the conferences was improved. Conference packs, professionally produced, included glossy publications from sponsors as well as pens, paper, folders, and, of course, lanyards. One regrettable feature of the post-2000 conferences was a decline in the appearance of international delegates who had regularly featured at CRS conferences. This was not a deliberate policy but might indicate a waning of the influence of the Commonwealth as well as pressure of business. In 2004, consideration was given to extending membership to the Republic of Ireland. But the initiative was not sustained. In 2019, the constitution was amended to introduce an Associate Membership category to facilitate a small number of requests from individuals based in other countries to join but take up has been modest.

Not all was plain sailing. Attendance at the September conference had been declining leading some to question the benefit of two conferences a year for all members. Nevertheless, the pattern of two conferences a year was maintained. Attendance at both remained respectable but there was a clear tendency for a smaller percentage of members to attend than during the early 1990s. This partly reflects the growth in the membership and the pressures of work. The conference papers are also made available to all members whether they attend or not.

Issues of governance, including reforms to statutes, and better regulation featured heavily during Executive Committee and conference discussions. Fears about pension sustainability and reforms also emerged as key topics. There was a particular concern to ease the regulatory burden which inevitably increased given the complexities of legislation affecting all organisations, not just universities. The Executive Committee continued to engage with a wide range of other bodies. A list was maintained of AHUA representation on outside bodies. In 2010 it recorded membership of 103 different bodies or working groups ranging from the English National Purchasing Consortium through to the UUK Effects of Industrial Action on Students Group. AHUA was extremely well networked.

Greater emphasis was placed on raising the profile of AHUA and supporting leadership and management development. Both Margaret Hodge, Minister for Higher Education, and Sir Howard Newby, Chief Executive of the HEFCE, spoke at the 2002 spring conference in Exeter. There were, though, still traces of anxiety about the future. The Executive Committee in June 2002 noted:

- “AHUA needs to stay ahead of the game and identify potential threats from within HE, for example as academics further develop managerial skills.
- The profession should not be allowed to drift and a focus must be maintained in the areas of structures, role, personal and professional development.”

This last point proved to be a crucial and growing element in AHUA’s work – professional development for AHUA members themselves and the nurturing of the profession to produce the Registrars/Secretaries of the future. This was particularly the case during the decade from 2003 when David Allen, Registrar and Secretary of the University of Exeter, and Alison Wild, Registrar and Secretary of Liverpool John Moores University, were Chairs of the Association. Personal development had always been an implied benefit of participation in the conferences but now some opportunities were formalised. A membership survey was conducted in 2004 with a 73% response rate. It showed only 38% were responsible for a unitary structure at their institution – a significant change in a decade even allowing for the expansion of the sector.^[60] This emphasis on professional development coincided with the establishment of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education Management in 2004 (now merged into Advance HE) and there was regular engagement with the Foundation.

60 23 September 2004 Executive Committee AHUA office records

A Flying Higher programme for aspiring Registrars (and later renamed as Aspiring Registrars Programme) and Chief Operating Officers was put in place by the end of 2008 in partnership with the Leadership Foundation to help promote the next generation. The title ‘Chief Operating Officer’ became more common among AHUA members especially in institutions which had a separate University Secretary/Head of Governance.^[61]

61 Lee Sanders Chair’s report 2018 AHUA office records

As previously indicated, CRS had attracted sponsorship. This began at a modest level with a range of firms or organisations sponsoring the conference dinner from the late 1980s. During the 1990s and into the 2000s there was a greater tendency for sponsorship to come from organisations with a strong business interest in higher education. Executive search firms joined the small number of sponsors. Another change, which reflected the growing complexity of university business, was the emergence of legal firms as sponsors starting with Eversheds in 1997. They and two other sponsors were invited to present workshop sessions. Over the years the Association has benefited significantly from this type of sponsorship – mainly from legal firms working closely with the sector. The expertise they have brought to conference sessions has been especially useful and authoritative. A national sponsor concept was introduced in 2006 and interested organisations invited to pitch for the role. To date, legal firms have been the most supportive. The national sponsor has provided meeting rooms for the Executive Committee meeting typically in London.

A Law Forum was launched by AHUA in 2007 in partnership with six legal firms and open to a wider membership. It grew rapidly to over 250 members, holding its own separate meetings. This continued to operate for the next decade, doing much to enhance the ability of institutions to navigate an increasing complex legislative environment.

Markets and Members

Probably the single most significant change to the assumptions underlying higher education policy for England since the Robbins Report (1963) was the 2011 Higher Education White Paper – *Students at the Heart of the System* and the subsequent legislation to introduce high fees for home students. It set out to create a market in which institutions, including new privately funded providers, competed on price and provision for students. The assumptions about planning student numbers, which had been present since 1919, were swept away. It led to the replacement of the Higher Education Funding Council for England by the Office for Students in 2018. This new market-led environment presented challenges to AHUA and other sector-wide bodies. Higher education institutions had traditionally competed for students, research grants, and the like. They were acutely aware of the importance of league tables and competitive advantage, but they also recognised the importance of the overall health of the sector. Collaboration to disseminate better practice and performance was at the heart of AHUA and this new world created a new wave of uncertainty.

From 2010, the content of the conferences included more sessions on marketing and profile raising. In York in 2012 there was a session on 'Strategies and tactics for a high-fees environment'. The 2018 conference in Ulster offered views on 'Distinctiveness in a crowded marketplace'. In 2019, at Warwick, members attended a session on

'Public views of universities and managing reputation'. There was an increase in speakers drawn from outside of the higher education sector. Karen Brady, then Vice-Chair of West Ham United, spoke at the 2010 spring conference. Greg Dyke, former Director-General of the BBC, addressed the conference in 2012 about managing change in complex organisations. There were also indications of a greater attention to student matters. Regular meetings with the National Union of Students were in place during the 2010s.

The new Chair in 2013, Dr Jonathan Nicholls, Registry of the University of Cambridge, set out three aims:

- enhancing the Association's influence and contacts with HE associated bodies;
- maintaining and growing the membership by offering relevant and useful services and benefits, including a revised communications strategy and range of development activities;
- expanding the Ambitious Futures Graduate Programme.

In the first two he was successful.

Ambitious Futures was itself an ambitious programme to provide a routeway into the profession of higher education management for talented people. It ran successfully for a number of years and certainly succeeded in bringing on some highly capable individuals who may not otherwise have had the opportunity. The programme also reflected a concern about the way in which administrators, a term less frequently used by that stage, were channelled early in their careers into important but specialised aspects of university management – marketing, recruitment, timetabling, welfare, international office, and so on. This meant that they had comparatively little opportunity to develop a wider skill set or knowledge of how the institution operated. Such opportunities had been relatively easy, indeed compulsory, when the sector had been much smaller before the expansion of the 1990s. Individuals had to multi-task. The concern was that the sector would not be able to develop the Academic Registrar and the like of the future if a specialised or silo approach stifled development opportunities. Ambitious Futures was greatly facilitated by Paul Greatrix, Registrar of the University of Nottingham, and supported by AUA. Ambitious Futures gave its intake of over 30 trainees a year a wide range of opportunities shared between universities. In the end, the pressures of funding meant the project was not sustainable. The link with AUA remained with the AHUA office moving to co-locate with the AUA office in 2011.



**Dr Jonathan Nicholls, Registry,
University of Cambridge and
Chair of AHUA from 2013–2016**

It is a reflection on the changing pace of higher education management that during the 2000s the main or spring conference was effectively reduced to two working days with a departure early on the third day, achieved mainly by dropping the social programme. Delegates could still mix serious sessions with more entertaining ones. Those attending the Newcastle Conference in 2008 had the opportunity of an early evening open bus tour of the city – not for the faint hearted. Attendees at the Cambridge conference in 2015 could watch a demonstration of table tennis by Team England players before a panel session on cyber security. The gala dinner still featured but golf had disappeared into a bunker in the early 2000s.

Jonathan Nicholls also outlined an ambition for the AHUA to become the “go-to” professional organisation in the sector. This was something developed by his immediate successors Liz Winders, Secretary at Sheffield Hallam University, and Lee Sanders, Registrar of the University of Birmingham. AHUA continued the CRS approach of not setting out to be a headline grabbing organisation. Instead, it aimed to offer “...informed, wise and well-respected advice for government and sector bodies...” often about the implementation of national policies that had already been agreed elsewhere.^[62] This made it a safe body to consult even when it strongly disagreed with a policy or approach. It did not misuse its access.

62 Lee Sanders Infographic 18 March 2019 AHUA office records

During the 2010s the personal development opportunities for members were strengthened with coaching and learning sets proving popular. Between 2010, when they were established, and 2018, 97 members participated in learning sets – benefiting from small-scale and confidential conversations with other members in the set. The coaching aspect of the organisation was developed further and has become one of the most popular services to members under the direction of the Programme Director and Development Consultant, Robin Henderson, from 2017. Other programmes include online governance, and the Secretaries Programme. It is perhaps a testament to the developmental work that in 2016 H.M. Revenue & Customs agreed to classify AHUA as a Learned Society for tax purposes having been satisfied that the organisation met the conditions for VAT exemption under “the fostering of professional expertise” and “the advancement of a particular branch of knowledge” schedules.

With the increasing number of higher education providers, the Executive Committee revised the membership criteria to permit non-traditional higher education providers to apply for membership as part of a deliberate effort to make the organisation more inclusive.

Take up from private sector institutions has been modest but still important and AHUA membership criteria no longer follows UUK's membership rules. It also changed the requirement for the member to report directly to the head of the institution, recognising that a 'dotted' reporting line might be appropriate.^[63]

63 Lee Sanders Chair's report 2018
AHUA office records

Promotional work accelerated with a much more active website and blogs from 2014 on a wide range of management topics. This work was promoted by Nicola Owen, Deputy Chief Executive (Operations) of Lancaster University, and has continued to be a feature of her term as Chair which commenced in 2020. Twitter or X was used to help generate interest in such pieces. AHUA now has around 2,400 followers on Twitter or X. The AHUA's work in this area was supported by Pickle Jar Communications before more capacity was provided in the office. All of this effort raised the profile of the web site. In 2022, there were over 57,000 visits to the web site which has a wide range of publicly available articles, podcasts, and other information for members only.^[64]

64 Infographic 25 July 2023 AHUA
office records

AHUA today: 2024

As I write the AHUA has 190 members from 140 institutions. It continues to have regular liaison meetings with the Office for Students, Department for Education, UK Research and Innovation, UUK, and CUC. There is much more diversity in the titles of members. The traditional title of 'Registrar' is now less common but certainly still present. Pro-Vice-Chancellor and other more managerial titles, particularly Chief Operating Officer, feature in the list of members. Virtually all the traditional higher education sector providers remain members and many appoint two individuals to participate and contribute to the work of AHUA. Women now constitute 49% of the membership. Ethnic diversity amongst members is less apparent. A reciprocal mentoring programme between staff of colour and AHUA was launched in 2023.

The Covid pandemic of 2020–2021 knocked things sideways and led to a cancellation of the planned conferences. For the first time in over 70 years the heads of university services failed to hold their spring conference. But the pattern was quickly re-established in 2022. The finances of the organisation remain strong. It is notable that AHUA, like UUK, has continued to act as a UK-wide organisation even during three decades of increasingly divergent higher education policies across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales since the 1990s. Particular care has been taken not to let English only issues dominate to the exclusion of all else.



The current Chair, Nicola Owen, identifies three priorities for 2024:

- Better Regulation and Bureaucracy
- Student Life – the most effective support for the student experience
- Future Planning – anticipating future challenges.

It is worth reflecting that echoes of all three priorities can be traced in the history of AHUA/CRS over all the many decades of its existence. They are, and always will be, not problems to be solved but issues to be managed.

**AHUA Spring Conference at
University of Leeds, 2024**

What of the future?

Well, that is best considered by the current members of the Association and their successors. From an historical perspective, the higher education sector has benefited from the work of the AHUA over the decades. I for one hope that this continues. Jonathan Nicholls summed it up well with his address on stepping down as Chair in 2016:

“The Association has been a big part of my life since I became a Registrar in 1999. It brings together so many people with different backgrounds and from different parts of the sector but all with decent, common aims to make universities and higher education better for students, staff, and our communities. The knowledge, expertise and experience contained within this membership is profound and the willingness to share this with others is inspiring.”

People & places

Chairs of AHUA

1994–1996	Ian Powell, Registrar and Secretary, University of Exeter
1996–1998	Ian Miller, Secretary and Registrar, Napier University
1998–2003	Eddie Newcomb, Registrar and Secretary, University of Manchester
2003–2006	David Allen, Registrar and Secretary, University of Exeter
2007–2013	Alison Wild, Registrar and Secretary, Liverpool John Moores University
2013–2016	Dr Jonathan Nicholls, Registry, University of Cambridge
2016–2017	Liz Winders, Secretary, Sheffield Hallam University
2017–2020	Lee Sanders, Registrar, University of Birmingham
2020–present	Nicola Owen, Deputy Chief Executive (Operations), Lancaster University

Business Secretaries of CRS and AHUA

1980–1984	Dr Herbert Burchnall, Registrar, University of Liverpool
1984–1989	Alex Currie, Secretary, University of Edinburgh
1989–1992	Derek Schofield, Secretary and Registrar, University of Southampton
1992–1994	Ken Kitchen, Registrar, University of Manchester
1994–1998	Michael Paulson-Ellis, Registrar and Secretary, University of East Anglia

Executive Secretaries/ Honorary Secretaries from December 2000

1998–2000	Mike Wilkinson, Secretary, Leeds Metropolitan University
2000–2003	Alison Wild, Registrar and Secretary, Liverpool John Moores University

Executive Officers

2001–2005	Jeremy Hoad
2005–2006	Mike Littlewood (former Academic Registrar at the University of Manchester)
2006–2024	Catherine Webb
2024–	Ben Vulliamy

National Sponsors

2005–2009	Pinsent Masons (4 year term)
2009–2018	SGH Martineau (Shakespeare Martineau) (3 x 3 year terms)
2018–2021	Mills & Reeves, Carson McDowell, Anderson Strathern
2021–2024	Mills & Reeves, Carson McDowell, Burness Paull
2024–2027	Shakespeare Martineau

Annual conference venues

1939	King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne	1971	University of Birmingham
1940	University of Liverpool	1972	University College of North Wales, Bangor
1946	University of Bristol	1973	University of East Anglia
1947	University of Birmingham	1974	University of Keele
1948	University of Sheffield September: University of London	1975	University of Lancaster
1949	University of Leeds September: University of London, Senate House	1976	University of Sheffield
1950	University of Edinburgh	1977	New University of Ulster
1951	University of Nottingham	1978	University of Loughborough
1952	University of Oxford	1979	University of Essex
1953	University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire (Cardiff)	1980	University of Bath
1954	Queen's University Belfast	1981	Heriot-Watt University
1955	University of Glasgow	1982	University College of Swansea
1956	University of Manchester	1983	University of Surrey
1957	University of Cambridge	1984	University of Warwick
1958	University of Reading	1985	University of Bradford June: University of Manchester special meeting on Jarratt Report December: University of Birmingham special meeting on review of UGC
1959	University of Liverpool	1986	City University June: University of Bradford special meeting on response to UGC May 1986 letters
1960	University of Durham	1987	University of St Andrews September: University of Birmingham
1961	University of Exeter	1988	University College Wales, Aberystwyth September: University of Warwick
1962	University of Aberdeen	1989	University of Salford September: University of Stirling
1963	University of Hull	1990	University of Kent September: University of Nottingham
1964	University of Bristol	1991	Open University September: Loughborough University
1965	University of Southampton		
1966	University of Leeds		
1967	University of Sussex		
1968	University of Durham		
1969	University of Leicester		
1970	University of York		

1992	University of Newcastle upon Tyne September: University of Bath	2008	Newcastle University September: Goldsmiths College
1993	January: London School of Economics King's College September: University of Birmingham	2009	Leeds Metropolitan University September: Loughborough University
1994	University College of North Wales, Bangor September: Brunel University	2010	Aston University September: Lancaster University
1995	University of Aberdeen September: University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology	2011	University of Exeter September: University of Leicester
1996	University of Wolverhampton September: Royal Holloway College	2012	University of York September: University of Birmingham
1997	University of Manchester September: University of Derby	2013	Edge Hill University September: University of Nottingham
1998	University of Southampton September: University of Reading	2014	Brunel University September: University of Wolverhampton
1999	Queen's University Belfast September University of Birmingham	2015	University of Stirling September: University of Derby
2000	University of Glamorgan September: University of Bradford	2016	University of Cambridge September: Birmingham City University
2001	University of Strathclyde/University of Glasgow September: University of Nottingham	2017	Ulster University September: Nottingham Trent University
2002	University of Exeter September: University of Warwick	2018	University of Manchester September: University of Warwick
2003	University of Cambridge September: University of Bristol	2019	University of Birmingham September: University of Keele
2004	University of Hull September: University of Stirling	2020	spring cancelled due to Covid November: online conference
2005	University of Hertfordshire September: University of Sussex	2021	online conference September: Loughborough University
2006	University of Oxford September: University of Cardiff	2022	University of Glasgow September: University of Leicester
2007	University of Manchester September: University of Bristol	2023	University of Winchester September: Sheffield Hallam University
		2024	University of Leeds September: University of East London
		2025	University of Swansea

A note on sources

This history is based almost entirely on written sources. The main set of records are held in the AHUA office. These are not in a structured archive but are still an excellent source for this administrative history. To avoid excessive footnoting, I have only referenced material not found in the AHUA office or where there is a particular key document. I have been able to use material held by the archives of the University of Cambridge and the University of Durham. These have been invaluable in providing evidence on the early years of the Conference. I am especially grateful for the information, advice, and guidance provided by Nicola Owen, Catherine Webb, John Lauwerys, Mike Shattock, Lee Sanders, and Ian Stewart. All opinions and errors are my responsibility.

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