

***Bridge building: outcomes and the humanities* by Prof Ian Saunders**

While there are areas of clear fit between an outcomes approach and the humanities and social sciences, experience suggests there is often a struggle to bring the two together. Fears about loss of disciplinary content, “dumbing down”, and technocratic determinism—amongst others—drive resistance. My argument is that if an outcomes approach is to have traction in the humanities, rather than dismissing these, one has to understand what underwrites them, and allow the humanities to “speak back” to the outcomes model. In particular, familiar themes drawn from language theory (on metaphor and predication), from critical theory (the dialogic nature of knowledge) and postmodernism (a suspicion of “grand narrative”) help recast and understand the grounds for that resistance, but also help show what an outcomes approach might bring to the humanities. The latter includes a revaluing of “content”: rather than seeing it as hopelessly at odds with the verbal regime of outcomes (“describe”, “compare”, “evaluate”), something intrinsically active. It also includes taking creativity seriously; and recognising interpretation, seeing from the perspective of an other, as the functional knowledge most characteristic to the humanities and social sciences, and as such powerfully expressed through and supportive of an outcomes approach.