

Autumn Budget 2024 / Spending Review - Stakeholder Representation – the British Academy

The UK has an enviable and long-held global reputation for excellence in the humanities, arts and social sciences. This allows us, in collaboration with scientific disciplines, to enact change and pioneer new ways of understanding what it means to be human: our past, our present, and how we might shape our future.

Today, societies around the world face challenges that are greater than ever before. There is a pressing need for deep understandings of cultures, histories, geographies, languages, institutions, economies, behaviours, laws and beliefs – all of which are the subjects of the social sciences and humanities. With the evidence and insight drawn from these subjects, Governments can act with urgency and confidence to ensure our national security whilst rebuilding Britain and strengthening our international relations.

Pivotal to a secure, healthy, and economically prosperous nation are the ideas and insights from the SHAPE (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy) disciplines. Here, in our submission to the 2024 Spending Review, the [British Academy](#) sets out three ways government can utilise the vast potential of the humanities and social sciences to support its ambitious plans to rebuild Britain and ensure the UK maintains its global reputation for excellence in all disciplines. From artificial intelligence to climate change, our disciplines provide crucial insights to address today's complex challenges and shape a better future for us all.

1/ Break down barriers by supporting an educational and research system that is sustainable, sparks creativity and offers opportunities to all

Our rapidly changing world requires a flexible, creative and [multilingual](#) workforce. In sectors where the UK is a global leader, [skills learnt from studying SHAPE disciplines](#) power imaginations and foster understanding of other people, places and times. This is

exemplified when technology and the arts meet, as they do in the creative industries.

However, universities are under financial pressure – with the value of tuition fees having eroded over a decade – resulting in cuts to courses and departments, particularly in the SHAPE disciplines. These threats to the humanities and social sciences are impacting our ability to maximise the economic and social value from research across all disciplines. This is all restricting student choice and is threatening our world leading reputation for research and potential for economic growth. Recent research from Universities UK shows that this vibrant sector generates £14 of economic benefit for every £1 invested into them.

To address these challenges, we call for:

- **An urgent review of higher education funding** to deliver a sustainable model that delivers a wide breadth of subjects and is resilient to regional inequalities in provision.
- **A broad, balanced and interconnected school curriculum**, which will enable and encourage all students to study a range of disciplines and languages for as long as possible.
- **A commitment to a responsibly open immigration system for international students** which recognises that the strength of our universities lies in their international character.

To support the Government in this endeavour, the British Academy is already committed to:

- Continued support for the next generation of researchers through our early career researcher network (ECRN), wide variety of fellowship programmes both domestic and international, and small grants programme.
- Investing significantly to grow the SHAPE Observatory, scaling up its capabilities to analyse the health of our disciplines, to help safeguard the sustainability and capacity of the SHAPE research base and to demonstrate its value, such as this latest research into the narrowing of the subjects that post-16 students are studying.

2/ Use insights and evidence — from all disciplines — to serve the country's needs and address society's biggest challenges
Research from all disciplines – SHAPE and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) – will be vital in tackling the most significant challenges in the world today. Both working together are critical to realising the potential and maximising the value and public benefit of new technology and innovation. But we need new research and data infrastructures, and better join-up across the institutions which support the whole system.

To address these challenges, we call for:

- **The UK to be a leading country in the G7 on R&D** (research and development) intensity with increased public sector investment delivered through stable funding which is more fairly distributed

across all disciplines to ensure we unlock the public and economic benefits of innovation.

- **Government to use insights from SHAPE disciplines** in thinking about key technologies to ensure innovation is safe, ethical, well-regulated, inclusive and sustainable.
- **Improved support for museums, libraries and archives** which provide valuable research infrastructure for the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.
- **Greater collaboration across the ministerial portfolios** responsible for universities and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, so that there is recognition of the strong synergies across the system.

To support the Government in this endeavour, the British Academy is already committed to:

- Delivering ground-breaking insights into how our [governance and political institutions](#) need to be equipped to face the major policy challenges ahead, from [net zero](#) to the [drivers of global \(dis\)order](#)
- Supporting the Government to consider the longer-term, foundational elements of an integrated economic strategy through our ongoing policy programme with HMT and DBT
- Exploring the ways in which digital technologies, tools and practices shape and are shaped by our society to understand '[what makes a good digital society?](#)', looking at how advances in digital technology help to address, rather than exacerbate, inequalities
- Establishing new collaborative programmes of research with civil society and community-based partners to explore the role of social and cultural services, institutions and [infrastructures](#) in supporting our quality of life
- Distributing in excess of £70m in research funding over 24/25 supporting discovery research, cross sector mobility, international mobility and the [British International Research Institutes](#).

3/ Collaborate with partners abroad and nurture research talent in the United Kingdom

The UK has made good progress in investing in R&D in recent years and we welcome the [association to Horizon Europe](#). We now need cross party consensus to maintain and increase steady investment in research. A recent [Universities UK report](#) found that for every £1 of public funding invested in research, the UK higher education sector generates £9.90 with a total economic impact of higher education research at more than £54 billion per annum demonstrating exceedingly good value for money. Long-term funding settlements and clearly articulated strategies will create a [stable environment](#). Research is an international endeavour and [global collaboration](#) is essential for the UK to maintain its thriving innovation environment.

To address these challenges, we call for:

- The Government to further **articulate their vision for multiyear and ten-year budgets** in spending reviews, in order to provide the

stability needed to achieve excellence in research and innovation, and to demonstrate long-term commitment to investors across the R&D sector.

- **The UK to play an active role** in shaping the development of the next EU Framework Programmes for Research & Innovation and to associate to the Erasmus Plus scheme.
- The Government to **restore Official Development Assistance** spending to 0.7% of Gross National Income with immediate effect.
- **The reduction of barriers to international collaboration** and research mobility with a substantial cut to the costs of visas and associated fees, the end to the need to pay upfront for these costs, the removal of the Immigration Health Surcharge and for sanctuary to be provided to researchers at risk around the world, as the UK has done in relation to Ukraine.

To support the Government in this endeavour, the British Academy is already committed to:

- Boosting participation in Horizon Europe to reintegrate UK-based researchers into EU programmes and networks
- Supporting international mobility and collaboration ensuring equitable partnerships and knowledge systems strengthening is at the heart of our [programmes](#)
- Developing international partnerships and convening expertise on research, policy and practice on key global challenges, such as global disorder, just transitions and cities
- Being an endorsing body for the Global Talent Visa scheme
- Supporting the Government's ambitions to rebuild international relationships through delivering international science partnership fund programmes

For more information about the British Academy and our work please contact us at: publicaffairs@thebritishacademy.ac.uk