

Social Sciences in a Time of Change, 2020-2022

A study to assess the impacts of Covid-19, Brexit and policy changes on the health of the social sciences in higher education, 2020-2022

A collaborative project led jointly by the Academy of Social Sciences and the University of Lancaster and grant funded by the ESRC (UKRI)¹

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Executive Summary

This project was triggered by the need to understand the impact on the social sciences of a period of unprecedented turbulence since early 2020. The three main disruptors - Covid, Brexit and HE policy changes - are working through the system on different time scales and with some far-reaching impacts. The key findings of the project, informed by a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches, are outlined below. They are followed by proposals for follow up actions.

Key Findings

1. **Changes and challenges brought about by Brexit and Covid are complex** – at institutional, discipline and individual levels – with some clear differential impacts for the social sciences.
2. **Academic staff at all levels rose to the Covid response and pulled together.** Frequent reports of staff exhaustion and ‘burn out’ caused by the sheer effort put into making the simultaneous transition in teaching and home working/caring happen under lockdown, and in sustaining it. HE management responded well and imaginatively to the demands placed on them.
3. **Teaching modes and working from home are likely to see long-term changes** (especially in the non-lab-based sectors that include most of the social sciences) that may also impact on strategic decisions over university estate management. Covid demonstrated that large scale online teaching is possible; and some students are expressing a preference for some content to be delivered online. International PGT students, dominated by Chinese nationals, are one such group. Strategic decisions will need to be made about when and for whom to use online teaching and when not.
4. **Complex impacts of the pressures above on staff. Three groups were identified** as particularly affected in multiple different and intersecting ways: **ECR/PGR; female** (with childcare or other caring responsibilities); **and mid-career** (with additional administrative or leadership responsibilities). It especially hit their current research continuity and research planning capacity, and the development of the pipeline in terms of the PGR/ECR cohort.

5. **Highly differentiated effects on research at the individual level** – some had a ‘good covid’ and others did not. This led to unpredicted distortions to research activity and possibly to research grant applications. Some social scientists whose work was field-based, location specific, or based on face-to-face qualitative methods, were especially impacted. Loss of research funding where the social sciences excelled, specifically ODA (GCRF) and EU funding will further add to differential impacts. However, social scientists also benefitted significantly from their success in Covid-related and Brexit-related research, including successes in the associated UKRI calls.
6. **Pandemic experiences brought about further changes in the research culture in the social sciences** and may have also helped to accelerate changes that were already underway beforehand. The changes reported include enhanced approaches to mission-oriented research, multi-disciplinary research and locally focused research (and teaching), and to collaboration in general. This offers institutions and funders strategic pathways for building future research agendas.
7. **Student numbers in the social sciences remained robust and increased at UG/PGT** despite initial fears otherwise. This largely resulted from changes to A Level marking in both 2020 and 2021 leading to a bulge in home student entry in many, but not all, institutions; and from additional measures put in place to boost international PGT recruitment, which more than compensated for falling numbers of EU students from 2021. Social science faculties are facing strategic decisions over whether to retain extended numbers or revert to pre-Covid planned levels.
8. **Student increases (UG and PGT) in the social sciences were disproportionately high in disciplines that might more readily be identified by applicants as professional** (business and management, law, economics), vocational (education), and/or that enjoy among the highest A Level student numbers (business and management, sociology). This is not currently a threat to institutional support across the breadth of social sciences but is a trend that has the capacity in the long term to reshape the social sciences.
9. **Initial fears of financial difficulties arising from student responses did not materialise** and, in early 2022, the financial position in the social sciences was reported as better than many had feared. However, that may be short-lived in the face of recent government policy for HEI funding and once access to EU funding is decided. Future challenges are coming that will be disproportionately felt in the social sciences.
10. **Brexit impacts on staffing in the social sciences is still working its way through.** Currently a steady trickle is reported of EU nationals returning ‘home’. This was believed likely to increase as future access, or otherwise, to EU funding clarifies and face-to-face teaching returns fully. Differential impacts on certain disciplines may be anticipated as proportions of EU origin staff vary considerably. A negative change in attitude to UK collaboration on EU funding applications was widely reported.
11. **Future levels of research funding for social sciences are under pressure and likely to be even more competitive.** Central government direct spend and charitable

funding has essentially been flat since 2010. UKRI spend has been up somewhat due largely to multi-disciplinary mission-led initiatives like GCRF and the Industrial Strategy, but Brexit is now impacting through the likely loss of EU Horizon funding in which the social sciences did disproportionately well. This is happening at a time when, arguably, the need for better social science data infrastructure, and more social science research and evidence is greater than ever given current UK and global challenges.

12. **With the tuition fee freeze further extended, teaching income is also now under pressure** with institutions reporting income is no longer covering teaching costs in the social sciences, let alone STEM. Some see international students as the main way to bring in more teaching income in the social sciences, as even during Covid international student numbers were healthy. But expansions in international student numbers could put pressure on the numbers of UK students that can be accepted. Others are looking to try to diversify income sources.
13. **There will be differential impacts across different university groups, with the Post-92 group perceived to be relatively more vulnerable**, although this does not apply to all institutions. This group expressed greater concerns over the introduction of employability metrics and minimum grade entry requirements. The challenges for some of the Post-92 group raises questions as to whether we will start to see greater differentiation in HE. It also raises some serious concerns over the effects on access to higher education among the most disadvantaged groups in society, on training for key workers, and on 'levelling up'.
14. **At the time of our most recent data gathering, in early February to early April 2022, confidence across the social sciences community was high**, although uncertainty about the future was starting to creep in. Social science leaders felt that the past two years had underscored the importance of the social sciences to universities and society in research, financial and employment terms, and that this had been recognised. It is undoubtedly something to build upon.
15. **The decisions in coming weeks and months over research funding will be critical in affecting whether or not the UK retains a world leading reputation in social science research** and further develops the applications of that research to the challenges facing the UK and the world. It is vital that social science research is fully recognised and supported in any UK replacement for EU funding and in future UKRI strategic funding and multi-disciplinary cross-Council programmes.

Action points: monitoring, research and funding

The academic system remains in a state of adjustment to the disruptors. Many of the impacts, and the effects of recovery strategies put in place, will only be fully seen over the coming years. In the report we have therefore made suggestions as

to what areas would benefit, and why, from monitoring and from additional research and future funding considerations. For ease of reference, they are listed here **and the numbered action point is highlighted in the text of the main report.**

Unless otherwise specified below, these recommendations are primarily for ESRC/UKRI to consider and take forwards.

Teaching and working practices

1. Monitor the nationality of social science academic staff to clarify any trends in EU origin numbers, and any disciplines/research areas in the social sciences facing significant academic staff shortfall as a result.
2. Monitor the ongoing impacts on academic career development in the social sciences of multiple intersections of gender, career stage, caring and other social responsibilities during the pandemic. This is likely to be a long-term process.
3. The social sciences take a lead in systematic research to gain a deeper understanding of student benefit from, and barriers to, online teaching and learning. (Also in Policy (1) below.)

Student Recruitment and HEI impacts

4. Monitor the tentative indications that more home undergraduate students are appearing to choose courses that have a vocational aspect or appear more obviously linked to professions and employability. This has the capacity to reshape the social sciences. (See also policy (4) below.) **(Action: OfS; ESRC/UKRI)**
5. The cross-subsidy from the social sciences to other areas in HEIs is worth monitoring, especially as HE policy changes may alter this capacity for cross subsidy which may, in turn, change the standing of the social sciences within HEIs. **(Action: AcSS; ESRC/UKRI)**
6. A Level grade inflation in 2020 and 2021, and the increases in students in higher tariff institutions, introduced volatility into the system. New OfS regulatory measures and continued fee freezes may add to that. We suggest monitoring student intakes: in particular the Post-92 institutions given their large UG social science numbers and the higher tariff institutions for the balance of UK and international students. **(Action: OfS)**

Research and research continuity

7. The impact of events in 2020-2022 on the career development of the PGR and ECR cohorts active in that period would benefit from monitoring as respondents felt that the full impacts on these groups will take time to play out. (See also Policy (5) below.)
8. Likewise, the impact on the affected mid-career cohort in terms of the research continuity and research innovation over the medium term is worth monitoring.

9. We also suggest that gendered impacts arising from the events of 2020-2022 in the social sciences would benefit from further detailed study, as these will also take time to play out and may have differential impacts across disciplines.
10. Reference to decreases in research time and reductions in grant submissions may be an area worth monitoring for any medium-term impacts and to understand which communities of scholars and institutions, if any, see lasting impacts.
11. Should this happen, the impact of dropping out of access to EU research grant funding on research outputs, research innovation and collaboration and the health of the social sciences more generally deserves future research attention.

Policy, future challenges and strategic matters

12. We recommend that social science leads on systematic research to gain a deeper understanding of undergraduate student benefit from, and barriers to, the migration to digital teaching and learning.
13. Monitor and evaluate the ongoing impacts of Covid, Brexit and the 2022 HE policy changes on the Post-92 university sector in particular. This is where the risks of volatility are the greatest. The OfS employability metrics in particular may cause pressures especially in the less well-off areas of the country and result in reduced opportunities in those areas for local young people, for 'levelling up' and for training key workers. **(Action OfS; DfE; DLUCH.)**
14. Monitor EDI impacts in student intake over the next five years as policy changes start to bite; and careful consideration of the intersection of 'levelling-up' and the role of universities, especially university social science, would also be beneficial. **(Action OfS; DfE; DLUCH.)**
15. There is a need and an opportunity to raise awareness further among potential and existing students, at all levels (UG, PGT and PGR), of employability and employment options across the social sciences, and how more granular and informative careers advice could be given. **(Action AcSS; Learned Societies.)**
16. Research funders and institutions are strongly encouraged to continue to support and enable the rebuilding of affected research planning and careers over the coming two to three years, and in particular in the ECR/PGR cohort. **(Action ESRC/UKRI; HEIs; UUK.)**
17. Given the likely significant changes to research funding in the social sciences, with the losses in ODA funding, uncertainty over access to EU funding and a planned reduction in UKRI strategic challenges funding, sustaining research funding for the social sciences and their many contributions to addressing UK and global challenges, in the new funding frameworks that arise, is vital. **(Action: ESRC/UKRI and all research funders.)**

1. Context



1.1 The project

The 'Social Sciences in a Time of Change Project' (SSTC) was triggered by the unprecedented combination of external shocks to the higher education (HE) system in the UK commencing in early 2020. These were the UK's formal exit from the EU, the Covid-19 pandemic and, at the time of initiation, anticipated higher education policy changes in response to the Augar review. The scale of these events was such that they presented both opportunity and challenge across the system. They were also likely to require both short-term responses and adjustment and to have potentially longer-term impacts. There were widely held concerns at the time as to how universities, and the social sciences, would be affected. The project ran from October 2020 to June 2022.

The project, a collaboration between the Academy of Social Sciences and the University of Lancaster, was funded by a grant award from the ESRC (ES/V012118/1) to explore and document the early indications and, where evident, the impacts of those dynamic changes on the 'health' of the social sciences in UK higher education. The aim was to generate 'real time' evidence-based insight and understanding of the emerging impacts and of the planning responses by institutions. While some impacts and responses were generic, affecting all sectors - STEM, social sciences and arts/humanities - we aimed to focus on those changes that were either specific to the social sciences or that impacted greatly on them. The reviews of the impact of Covid-19 on the HEI system as a whole (BEIS, 2020; UKRI, 2021b) have been most useful benchmarks.

This report is organised under four broad headings: i. teaching and working practices; ii. student recruitment and finances; iii. research and research continuity; and iv. policy, future challenges and strategic matters. Throughout we identify areas that have been widely commented upon and evidence the impact of those. We also include those for which the evidence will only emerge more fully in the future and which we feel will benefit from continued monitoring.

Attention is paid to different parts of the sector (Russell Group/Other Pre-1992/Post-1992 HEIs), and to the different settings in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The research discussion primarily concerns the social sciences in aggregate. The definition of social sciences used in this report is consistent with that in REF Main Panel C, other than not including archaeology as this typically identifies more with the humanities and is not included in the Academy's definition of social sciences. It is worth noting that the Panel C definition also excludes social and behavioural psychology, social healthcare studies and linguistics. To the

extent that disciplinary differences were regularly commented upon by respondents, they are included in this report, but we have not undertaken systematic studies of each discipline as that is beyond the scope of this project and is best undertaken by the individual learned societies.

1.2 Student Fees

The ten years from 2010 to 2020 saw significant decreases in the level of government funding of higher education. Following the Browne review in 2010, the upper cap on UK (home) student tuition fees rose to £9,000 (from £3,225) with effect from the September 2012 intake in England and Wales. An inflation adjustment raising the cap to £9,250 came into effect from 2017-18. Fees have been frozen at this level since then, although the original intention was for fees to rise by inflation annually. The freeze was most recently extended by government in 2022, for a further period of two years up to and including 2024-25, by the end of which fees will have been frozen for seven years (Department for Education (DfE), 2022).

Alongside the freeze in fees the OfS, in response to guidance from the DfE, abolished London weighted (LW) grants for universities in the capital and this came into effect from the start of the 2021-22 academic year. The motivation for this recommendation was that the LW element was seen as being inconsistent with the desire to level up the economy across the regions. However, a report from London Higher (2021) argued that removing the LW is not an effective way to address inequalities across the economy because London boroughs are highly represented in the most deprived areas of the country, with a third of areas being in the 30% most deprived parts of England. In addition, HEIs with a teaching focus which train key workers and play an important role in widening participation in higher education (HE) will be particularly affected (see levelling up in Section 6.2).

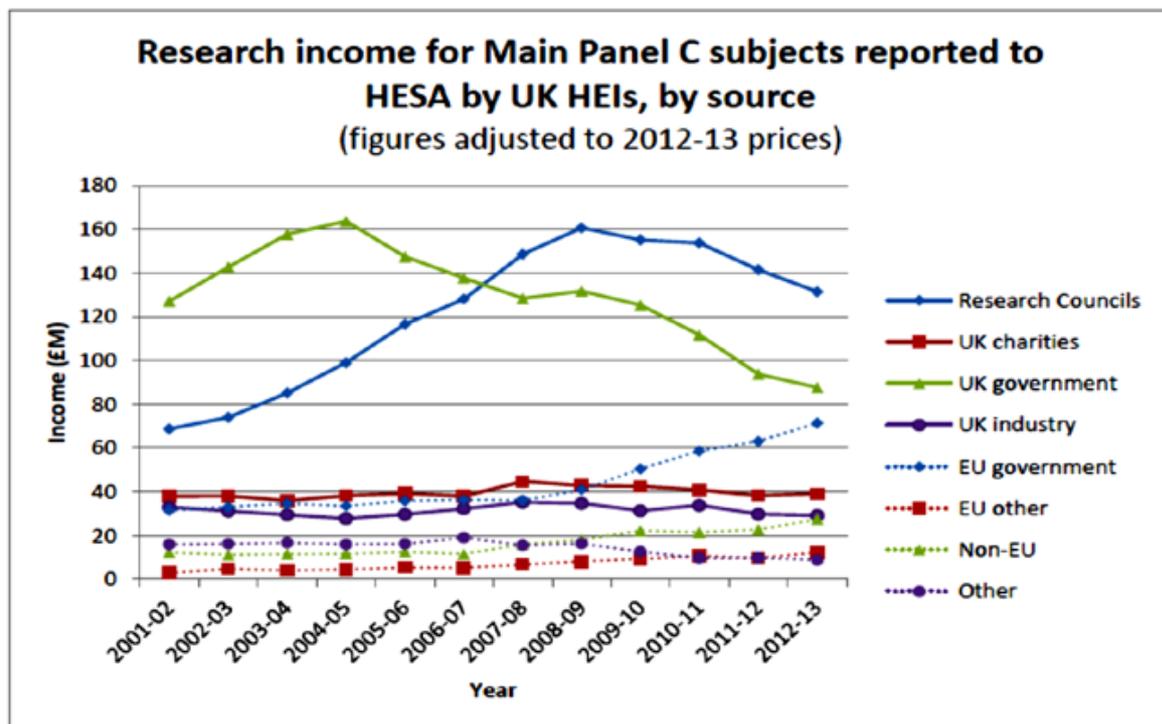
Student number caps in England and Wales (Hillman, 2014) were relaxed in 2014-15 and were abolished in 2015-16. However, in Scotland and Northern Ireland, a fixed cap of undergraduate numbers for HEIs within those nations continued to be supported and with the majority of their fees paid by the devolved administrations; UK fee levels applied to students from England and Wales studying in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Students from the European Union swelled the UKs university intakes on both undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate taught courses (PGT), paying the equivalent of UK undergraduate fees (£9,250). Exponential growth in PGT students

from other parts of the world, especially Chinese students studying masters-level business and management and other ‘professional’ courses, brought in substantial additional fee resources to universities through the social sciences.

1.3 Research funding

Research funding for UK HEI social science in the period 2001-2013 peaked in 2008-09 at c. £454m (adjusted to 2012-13 base year). This is equivalent to £515m adjusted to 2020-21 base year. Income then fell steadily to £410m (adjusted to 2012-13 base year) in 2012-13 (see Figure 1.3a), with both UK government and Research Council funding decreasing.



Note: The ‘deflators’ used to adjust to base year 2012-13 are based on HM Treasury’s gross domestic product deflator.

Figure 1.3a A breakdown by source of funding for REF2014 Main Panel C (Hantrais & Lenihan, 2016)

By 2017-18 research grant income to REF Main Panel C units of assessment had risen to £571m (adjusted to 2020-21 base year), some 11% above that of the previous peak year, 2008-09 (adjusted to 2020-21). The pattern of funding between the different sources remained broadly similar between 2012-13 and 2017-18 but with discernible annual differences (Figure 1.3b). Research Council

funding, the largest single source for the social sciences, grew year on year between 2014-15 and 2017-18. By 2017-18 EU funding had risen above that received from UK government sources.

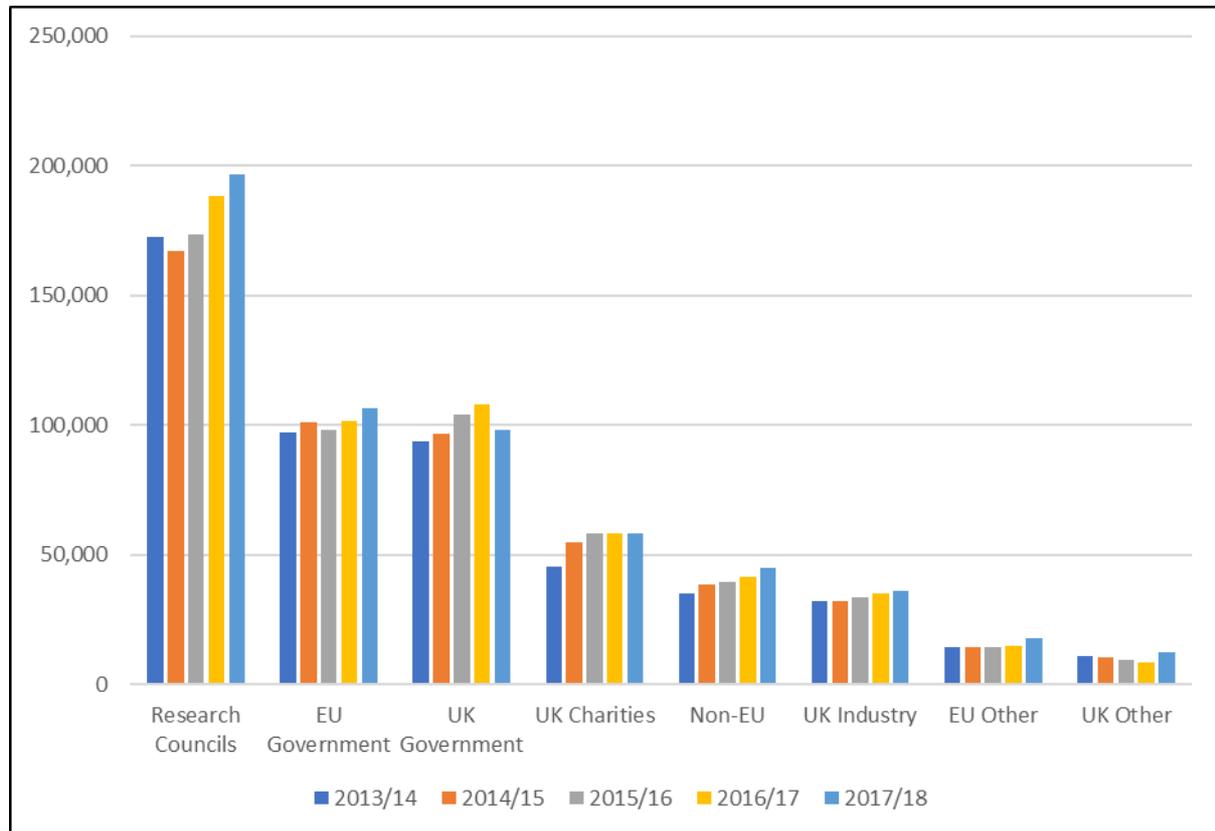


Figure 1.3b Research income by source, 2013-14 to 2017-18, REF Panel C Units of Assessment (UoA) (adjusted to 2020-21 prices using the HM Treasury GDP indices).

Historically, Lenihan and Witherspoon (2016) demonstrated that EU funding of UK social science had risen steadily against a backdrop of declining UK government investment and that social scientists have been highly successful in obtaining European Research Council (ERC) funding. However, the level of funding across the various social science disciplines was not even. For instance, for the period 2008 – 2014 there was a steady growth in EU funding for business and management but a small decline in funding for anthropology and development studies, politics and international relations and sociology² (Hantrais & Lenihan, 2016). Meanwhile, Britain’s annual share of funding overall from the EU Horizon

² It should be noted that the precise classification of social science disciplines can vary over time and from one context to another.

2020 research programme fell steadily between 2016, the year the UK voted to leave the EU, and 2019 (Else & Gibney, 2020; Figure 1.3c).

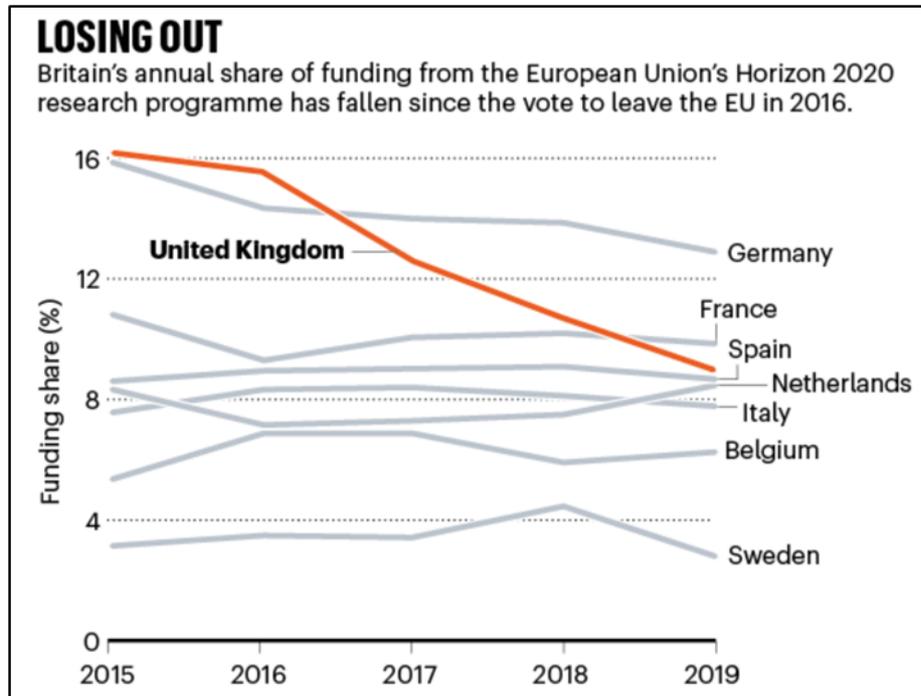


Figure 1.3c UK annual share of funding from EU Horizon 2020 since the vote to leave the EU in 2016 (from Else & Gibney, 2020).

As a result of the Covid pandemic UKRI (2021a) wrote to all UK HEIs announcing government cuts to UK Overseas Development Aid (ODA) funding for research of around 50% (an original budget for 2021-22 of £225m was cut to £125m). This had significant implications for the Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF), Newton Fund and other UKRI schemes. Importantly, these cuts had immediate implications for some projects that had already started. This move by the UK government was met with widespread disapproval from across the higher education and research sectors (Academy of Social Sciences, 2021; British Academy, 2021; Universities Scotland, 2021; UUK, 2021).

1.4 Social sciences: popularity of courses of study and standing

There are many indications that UK social science teaching, research and research impact have thrived over the past fifteen to twenty years. This is demonstrated, for example, in growth in student numbers (HESA data), the ESRC reviews of UK

social science disciplines in the 2010s, annual world university rankings, REF 2014 and more recently REF 2021 outcomes.

The popularity of social sciences courses is reflected in student intake numbers. The new undergraduate intake in 2018-19 for social sciences was 199,795. The majority (78%) were from the UK; 16% international and 6% from the EU. Although less than the 229,665 new undergraduate intakes for STEM subjects (including medical sciences and psychology), it was much greater than the 134,500 seen for all other subjects (largely arts and humanities).

The total enrolments for the social sciences stood at 694,625 in 2018-19. The majority (75%) of these were enrolled on their first degree, with 19% enrolled on PGT courses, and 3% on each of 'other UG' and PGR pathways. The gender balance for social science enrolments was females (54%) compared to males (46%). Ethnicity of the UK domiciled enrolments in 2018-19, where known, was white (71%), Asian (13%), Black (9%), Mixed (4%) and Other (2%). This shows that the social sciences are an engine of inclusion in higher education.

The research standing of the social sciences was captured in the Main Panel C overview of REF 2014. This concluded that 'the research outputs and descriptions of the research environment submitted for assessment were of higher quality than in previous exercises³' and that the high quality of the work was 'an extremely encouraging indication of the resilience and strength in depth of the social sciences ... within the UK' (REF2014 Main Panel C, 2015, p. 2).

The REF2021 Main Panel C (2022) report noted that the international advisors were greatly impressed by the quality of the outputs from UK social sciences. Overall, the view of the report was one of increasing quality with a comprehensive increase in world leading and internationally excellent research. Main Panel C was the only main panel with an increase in the number of submissions, with the highest proportionate increase in FTE staff, and was the only main panel to receive an increased number of outputs. In part this may reflect changes in the rules since REF 2014 though nevertheless it indicates a flourishing, vibrant and successful social science research community in the UK and is indicative of the strength of the social sciences in the UK. Given the timing of data capture, REF 2021 will have only marginally, if at all, captured the impacts on research of the external shocks that concern this study. We may have to wait until the next REF to see fully how those have played out.

2. Methodology



A four-phase mixed methodology was adopted for our study (details available in Appendices 1-3).

Phase one included in-depth qualitative interviews involving 33 individuals from 26 selected HEIs. Each interview was with one or more representatives from a single institution. The sample comprised 14 Russell Group institutions, seven Other Pre-92 institutions and five Post-92 institutions. Subsequent REF results, released in May 2022, indicate these institutions predominantly ranked within the top 40 with respect to REF Main Panel C outcomes (see Table 2.1). All interviews took place between March and August 2021, with the majority between March and May.

Panel C Group Rankings	Russell Group	Other Pre-92	Post-92	Total
1-20	10			10
21-40	4	5		9
41-60		2	2	4
61-80			2	2
81-100			1	1

Table 2.1.

The number of HEIs from each university group that took part in our in-depth interviews as a function of their REF 2021 ranking (Main Panel C outcomes).

Phase two was a complementary online quantitative survey. This survey had two aims. First it provided an opportunity to obtain a quantitative purchase on outcomes, trends and strategies in the social sciences to complement the initial qualitative in-depth interviews. Second, the survey was sent out to a much wider audience allowing the opportunity for greater engagement from the breadth of HEIs. The survey commenced in December 2021 and the final response received was submitted in March 2022. The survey was sent to 117 (22 Russell Group; 31 Other Pre-92 and 64 Post-92) institutions that have a social science footprint; the response rate was 40% (N=47). Of the 117 institutions polled, 20 out of the 22 (90.9%) Russell Group institutions responded; 14 out of 31 (45.2%) Other Pre-92 institutions responded; and 12 out of 64 (18.8%) Post-92 institutions; one response failed to identify an HE sector.

Looking at response rates by region, numerically the majority of the 47 responses were from HEIs in England (35; 75%), followed by Scotland (6; 13%), Wales (3;

6%) and Northern Ireland (1; 2%), with 2 (4%) responses failing to note their region. Expressing responses as a proportion of institutions polled in each area: England- polled 93, response rate 37.6%; Scotland- polled 16, response rate 37.5%; Wales- polled 6, response rate 50%; Northern Ireland- polled 2, response rate 50% shows a good balance in responses from the different administrations.

Phase three consisted of eight online focus group discussions each involving two or more institutions that took part in the in-depth interviews in Phase 1. The purpose was to follow through with the same institutions to review what had happened in terms of the issues identified a year previously and to discuss any further emerging issues relevant to the health of the social sciences one year on. The focus groups took place between mid February and early April 2022.

Phase four was the analysis of recently released HESA population data (<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis>) on students and staff for 2020-21, using a comparison with data for 2018-19 as the pre-Covid benchmark. Financial data for 2019-20 was also analysed and we hope to include financial data for 2020-21 if it is available by the time the report is completed.

Throughout the primary data collection we sought inputs from institutions' senior leaders in social sciences to ensure we had a consistent institution-wide perspective. In many cases these were academic deans responsible for social science, and in some cases pro-vice-chancellors who also had responsibility for social sciences. We were conscious in so doing that we would not tap into grass roots perspectives, other than indirectly. Additional supplementary input was sought from learned societies and/or heads of departments conferences in HEIs, concerning discipline perspectives, at two stages in the data gathering process.

In each of the sections that follows, we report on generic findings first, as a context, before considering social science specific findings and commenting on perspectives from different university university groups.

3. Teaching and working practices



Summary

All our evidence confirms the fact, also widely reported elsewhere (BEIS, 2020; UKRI, 2021b), that teaching and working practices were immediately and deeply affected by the pandemic in all institutions. Massive adjustments were necessarily swift and, while not without many difficulties, were a success in keeping university teaching, student progress in degree programmes and associated fee incomes going throughout the pandemic. This was against the backdrop of successive pandemic phases and government advice to higher education frequently changing at short notice.

Online teaching and home working, taken together, was the over-riding concern in all our in-depth interviews in Spring 2021, together with managing the impacts of those developments. It required the most enormous effort and time in capacity building, transitioning teaching materials and assessment processes, and supporting student and staff welfare. Many respondents referenced staff exhaustion and burnout and praised the collegial efforts across their institutions to effect the changes in teaching. This was against the backdrop of coping with Covid-driven changes in personal lives and other underlying concerns, such as pensions.

Efforts were universal, but impacts identified were differentiated by career stage, sector, and varied widely between individuals. A number of aspects were either specific to the social sciences or felt to be more pronounced in them. The impacts went beyond teaching to other areas of academic endeavour, as described in later sections. The resulting changes have, in the words of many respondents, ushered in new teaching and learning technologies and pedagogies and raised strategic questions in many institutions about the use of blended learning in the future.

3.1 HE generic findings

3.1.1 Working from home and online teaching

Although working from home has been a long-standing feature of academic life, the scale and speed of the shift to working wholly from home and to online only teaching was unprecedented. Throughout the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions, the additional time absorbed by effecting the change to online teaching and assessment and in managing increased student demands for support significantly impacted, for many academics, on the time available for other work-related activities in 2020 and 2021.

For some this necessitated a steep learning curve, particularly for colleagues less well versed in the use of technology and with limited experience of online teaching and collaboration. A few mentioned that this prompted uptake of offered severance schemes. It also, reportedly, raised a number of technical, logistical and equity challenges when dealing with students studying online across multiple time zones or from locations where internet access was poor or restricted.

Several benefits were also referenced in our qualitative work. These included increased flexibility in both delivery and consumption of course material and a renewed level of interest in how pedagogy works and in effective online teaching. Many spoke of an increase in international contacts facilitated by much of the world moving to an online-led environment and of greater – albeit formalised - interaction with them, having a positive impact on both teaching and research.

3.1.2 Changing the shape of future learning

The view was widespread that such rapid and profound shifts will change forever the way digital technologies will be used in teaching across HEIs. Indeed, there was a strong sense in the discussions that the experience is encouraging universities to consider, strategically, the future shape of teaching and learning, with particular emphasis on the extent and settings of hybrid or blended learning. A recent report suggested that blended learning may be a more viable approach than the pre-Covid status quo for HEI's in the future (Kim, 2020). Recent comparisons in China between face-to-face, online-only and blended approaches found that blended learning outperformed online-only learning in enhancing students' confidence and satisfaction; and it led to higher levels of student satisfaction compared with face-to-face learning (Ma & Lee, 2021).

3.1.3 Staff return to campus

For most UK-based academic staff, and virtually all of those working in the social sciences, home working characterised the period which began in April 2020 as the first lockdown was imposed. A staggered return began from March 2021 and all restrictions ended in July 2021 (Hubble, Bolton & Lewis, 2021). However, there were frequent references in our focus group discussions in Spring 2022 to the challenges of getting staff back on campus. Many shared the view that, as a result of the Covid-enforced experiment, the balance between home and campus-based working is likely not to return to pre-pandemic levels. Some went on to suggest that

this is encouraging, and even requiring, universities to re-think the campus or university estate.

3.1.4 Complex patterns of disadvantage

While most academic staff felt time-squeezed by the demands of rapidly moving to online teaching, assessment and student interactions, consistent qualitative evidence was presented of additional complicating factors that impacted negatively on particular groups and career stages. Three factors were often cited: the nature of home working infrastructure, the extent of caring responsibilities, the existence of high pre-pandemic workloads.

Mid-career academics were often singled out as one group being significantly affected by a combination of high pre-pandemic workloads and caring responsibilities. This is consistent with published research showing that the experience of homeworking varies as a function of the level of domestic commitments; those with greater commitments often exhibit decreased levels of productivity (Felstead & Reuschke, 2021).

Women academics were a second group frequently identified as being negatively impacted, especially those with young children and/or other caring responsibilities. This is consistent with independent research showing that the pandemic reinforced divisions of household labour where women tend to do more of the domestic and caring duties (Peetz et al., 2022).

The intersection of the time demands of the changes to teaching and learning, with the additional complicating factors above, meant that the impacts of the pandemic were complex and highly varied between colleagues. It was widely stated in our discussions that some colleagues who had fewer of these pressures had a 'good Covid' whereas others certainly did not.

Across our study, in the in-depth interviews, the focus groups and the survey, there was consistent and frequent comment on how the difference between a good and bad Covid experience was reflected in the time people were able to give to their research. This is the buffer that expanded or shrank according to individual combinations of circumstances. It is explored further in section 5 on research and is consistent with the findings from the initial BEIS (2020) survey.

3.1.5 Staff well-being

The impact of these events on staff wellbeing was nuanced. For example, not infrequently deans mentioned that academic and professional staff felt ‘exhausted’ or ‘burnt out’. This point was reinforced to us by learned societies when speaking of their ‘grass roots’ academic members. This picture is consistent with the poor levels of mental wellbeing reported by mid-career researchers and PGRs in particular (UKRI, 2021b). Our evidence indicates that institutions responded across the board with enhanced levels of welfare provision and support for both staff and students. This too is considered further in section 5.

Many deans also highlighted the extremely positive collegiate and collaborative commitment shown by staff to their institutions and students in responding to the Covid imperative.

3.1.6 Staff adjustments

Finally, the rapid pace of change and the high levels of uncertainty as to likely student (and potential student) behavioural responses, especially in 2020, led to financial risk mitigation measures being introduced in all the institutions we interviewed. The survey responses (Table 3.1) indicated the common measures used to control costs were cuts to staff support budgets (e.g., conference attendance, OA publishing), additional constraints to staff recruitment processes, and voluntary redundancy programmes.

Measure adopted	Percentage agreement
Cuts to staff support budgets	49%
Additional constraints with recruitment approval process	45%
Pandemic-related research continuity and recovery programme	45%
Voluntary redundancy programme	40%
Academic staff recruitment programme	38%
ECR support programme	32%
Recruitment freeze	28%
Inflationary pay freeze	19%
Cuts to staffing budgets	17%
Compulsory redundancy programme	2%

Table 3.1. Percentage of respondents (out of total N of 47) agreeing that the following financial mitigation and support measures had been implemented in their

institutions since 2020. (Note: black font = financial mitigation measures; blue font = support programmes.)

As the financial risks were mitigated and the worst-case scenarios failed to emerge (see section 4) a more permissive approach to academic staff recruitment emerged across the sector. In the social sciences, deans widely reported the intention to rebuild academic staff numbers to pre-pandemic levels, and in some cases to recruit above those levels.

It was in the 'small but steady trickle' of EU staff returning home that Brexit was reported as impacting on teaching and working. Furthermore, consistent conjectural comments indicated that there was an expectation that this might increase once staff were required to return to campus for teaching and in the context of difficulties over UK access to EU Horizon funding. A wider general trend of a reduction in the number of EU nationals working in UK universities in 2020-21 and fewer younger EU academics entering the UK was reported independently in 2020 (Baker, 2020b).

3.2 Social science specific findings

The 'generic' trends noted above arose from our interviews and discussions with social science deans and PVCs, and from the survey. They are strongly felt in the social sciences. However, it is the manner in which these generic trends intersect with the demographics of the social sciences, and of individual disciplines in the social sciences, that provides particular pause for thought.

3.2.1 Staff composition

First, some background staff data, from HESA data returns for 2018-19 and 2020-21. Total social science academic staff numbered 36,060 (FTE) in 2018-19 and 38,965 in 2020-21, an increase of 8%. (All data in this report excludes psychology as a discipline unless otherwise indicated.) The ratio of senior management (4%), professorial level (13%), and other staff (83%) remained the same in the two years. Of the total, 78% were on open-ended contracts and 18% on fixed term contracts, again similar in the two years. The highest proportion on fixed term contracts was in the Russell Group (23%), next the Other Pre-1992 institutions (19%), and the lowest in Post-92 institutions (13%). The main change in staffing between 2018-19 and 2020-21 was the increasing proportion of teaching only contracts among those with open-ended contracts. All three mission groups saw an increase in teaching

only contracts; the highest proportional increase (18% rising to 23%) and the highest absolute increase in numbers being in the Post-92 mission group. Although there had been a slight increasing trend in teaching only contracts in previous years, which may have been influenced by the changing REF submission criteria (Baker, 2020), given the greater increase seen here and the timing, we interpret it as largely reflecting a response to increasing student intakes (see section 4).

The gender balance of academic staff varies quite widely across the different sectors (STEM, social science etc). For the social sciences academic staff in 2020-21 it is close to balanced overall, with 54% male and 46% female. A small increase in the proportion of women occurred between 2018-19 and 2020-21, up from 44% to 46%. There is variation across the university groups, the proportion of women staff in 2020-21 being: 42% in Russell Group, 45% in Other Pre-92 HEIs, and 48% in Post-92 institutions. By contrast, the overall ratio in STEM sciences (including psychology but not medicine and associated cost centres) for 2020-21 is 68% male and 32% female (2018-19: 70%/30%).

In terms of ethnicity, the overall proportion of academic staff in the social sciences known to be from minority ethnic groups rose from 12% to 13% between 2018-19 and 2020-21, the increase being mainly in those with an Asian ethnicity. Post-92 institutions have the highest proportions (15%), falling to 10% in the Russell Group.

With respect to nationality, over this same time period, the proportion of international (non-EU) staff rose from 15% to 17%; EU nationals fell marginally (remained rounded to 17%); and the UK national proportion fell from 67% to 66%. This is consistent with the reports we received in early 2022 of a 'steady trickle of EU nationals returning'. The 2020-21 year is likely only to record the initial stages of this process. **Action 1:** This trend would benefit from monitoring in the social sciences over the coming three years, together with their disciplinary area of expertise. (We note there is already a review in train, chaired by Sir Paul Curran, of the impact of EU staff losses on environmental science expertise in the UK.)

EU national and international origin staff are disproportionately employed in the social sciences in Russell Group universities (23% and 20% respectively in 2020-21) as compared with Post-92 institutions (11% and 12% respectively in 2020-2021). Other Pre-92 HEIs are in between. In terms of absolute numbers, the Russell Group HEIs employed 3,060 EU national academic staff in the social sciences (2020-21), whereas the Post-92 institutions employed 2,215.

3.2.2 Intersectional points to watch

The high proportion of female academic staff in the social sciences is notable. With female academics being identified in all institutions as one of the vulnerable groups most impacted by combined home working and caring adjustments during the pandemic, it is very likely that the social sciences will experience a disproportionate impact on its community, on productivity overall, and potentially on some individuals' career trajectories, over this period and until such a time as the system re-balances. Support for this view comes from the UKRI survey (2021b) showing that, whilst on average 34% of respondents reported that Covid had produced a negative impact on their teaching responsibilities, this increased to 43% for those in REF Panel C (i.e., the social sciences).

Academic staff female/male (F/M) ratios vary substantially between social science disciplines (Table 3.2a). It could be reasonably expected therefore that the impacts of pressures on academics noted in the generic points earlier, will also vary between social science disciplines in subtle ways. For example, economics, with its low F/M ratio, may see further setbacks in the attainment and pay equality of women versus men. Conversely, social work, education and other disciplines with high F/M ratios may well have suffered disproportionately in terms of time lost to non-teaching activities.

Discipline	2018-19		2020-21	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Sports science & leisure studies	64%	36%	64%	36%
Architecture, built environment & planning	66%	34%	64%	36%
Geography & environmental studies	63%	37%	61%	39%
Anthropology & developmental studies	54%	46%	54%	46%
Politics & international studies	64%	36%	61%	38%
Economics & econometrics	72%	28%	71%	29%
Law	49%	51%	46%	53%
Social work & social policy	37%	63%	36%	64%
Sociology	46%	54%	45%	55%
Business & management studies	57%	43%	56%	44%
Catering & hospitality management	45%	55%	49%	51%
Education	34%	66%	32%	68%
Continuing education	43%	57%	40%	60%

Table 3.2a. Staff male/female ratios for the different social science disciplines (source HESA data).

Other discipline challenges in relation to online teaching were also noted by respondents. For example, courses that would traditionally include field work or face-to-face qualitative methodologies were seen as representing a particular difficulty; as were courses with significant lab-based components.

The multiple intersections of gender, career stage, caring and other social responsibilities will result in a complex picture between career development of different individuals, and possibly between disciplines, as the impacts play out over time. It is too early to tell what that might look like. **Action 2:** Our recommendation is to monitor impacts over the coming years. A survey of those in identified vulnerable groups (women with caring responsibilities, mid-career with institutional or other significant work responsibilities, and ECRs) in 2024 may be useful in providing evidence of the extent to which impacts in the social sciences have been short term or longer lasting, and in which career aspects and discipline dimensions those impacts have most been felt.

3.2.3 Staff/student ratios

Changes in staff/student ratios (SSRs) are strongly linked to adjustments to the pandemic. A 'bulge' in student numbers in both 2020 and 2021 – explained in Section 4 – resulted from a combination of early financial concerns during the pandemic and the A level marking issues.

HESA data indicate that aggregate SSRs by discipline increased in almost all social science disciplines between 2018-19 and 2021-22. The disciplines most affected were law, business and management, catering and hospitality management, education and sociology (Table 3.2b). (The increases were even higher if considered as a proportion of permanent teaching staff only.) This added further to the pressures already felt by staff.

Discipline	2018-19	2020-21
Sports science & leisure studies	18.2	18.8
Architecture, built environment & planning	16.3	17.0
Geography & environmental studies	13.2	13.0
Anthropology & developmental studies	12.9	13.1
Politics & international studies	16.4	16.9
Economics & econometrics	20.9	21.8
Law	20.3	22.3
Social work & social policy	16.4	17.3
Sociology	20.0	22.3
Business & management studies	21.4	24.2
Catering & hospitality management	19.6	22.2
Education	18.6	21.9
Continuing education	13.1	12.6
Grand total	19.1	20.8

Table 3.2b. HESA data on staff/student ratios (SSRs) for 2018-19 and 2021-22

However, there are suggestions that impacts on SSRs were felt in some institutions more than others. Our survey indicated that 53% (17) of social science deans responding had experienced a worsening SSR in their faculties since the beginning of 2020. Proportions recorded were higher among Russell Group institutions (47%) than Other Pre-92 (24%) and Post-92 (29%) institutions, though such differences may be an artefact of the sample size.

Respondents in the focus groups mentioned they had little choice but to recruit fixed-term or teaching only staff in the social sciences to help manage loads. HESA data for 2018-19 compared with 2020-21 show an absolute increase in social science academic staff numbers on fixed-term contracts (although the proportions remain similar) and an increase in the proportions of open-ended staff on teaching only contracts from 18% to 23% (5,480 to 7,435). The data for 2021-22 and 2022-23 should also be interesting. They will show whether or not the pandemic has accelerated a longer-term general trend in teaching only contracts. HESA (2022) data across all disciplines showed the number of academic staff on a teaching only contract to have increased by 30% since 2016-17; up from 56,130 to 72,970.

3.2.4 Teaching overseas PGT students

One final point from the focus group discussions is worth referencing in this section. Several deans commented upon the fact that Chinese students were now less willing to travel to the UK and, following changes made during the pandemic,

were increasingly requesting to study from home. Others also wondered about the impact of the war in Ukraine on propensity to travel. Social science disciplines at the forefront of this risk, owing to the relatively large proportions of international PGT students they recruit (mostly from China), are business and management, law and economics. Revenues generated by PGT teaching also contribute substantially to university coffers both through the social science 'overhead' and accommodation income.

Some respondents also raised the logistics and technological challenges experienced in online teaching for overseas PGT students. This included the challenges of dealing with international students across multiple time-zones and the use of specific virtual private networks (VPN) for working with students from China. More generally, if universities decide to pursue remote learning for PGT students more widely in the future, the technological requirements, such as high-speed broadband, may end up shaping the student cohort and in a way that may be adverse to a broad inclusion agenda.

Taken together with the points in the generic section (3.1) about potential future lasting impacts on styles of teaching and learning, and in particular a move towards greater use of blended learning, we recommend **(Action 3)** that the social sciences take a lead in systematic research to gain a deeper understanding of student benefit from, and barriers to, online teaching and learning, including for overseas PGT students.

3.3 University sector specific findings

The largest number of FTE academic staff in the social sciences are found in Post-92 institutions (20,620 in 2020-21; 41.2%); with Russell Group (16,720; 33.4%) second; and Other Pre-92 (12,695; 25.4%) the smallest group (HESA, 2022). Post-92 institutions also have the greatest proportion of female staff (50% in 2020-21, HESA). This compares with 47% F (Other Pre-92) and 43% F (Russell Group).

Typically staff in Post-92 institutions have a higher teaching to research time ratio than in other mission groups. Furthermore, a point made in the in-depth interviews suggested that students from less advantaged areas and backgrounds needed a greater level of staff support during the pandemic. Thus, all other things being equal, the Post-92 sector may have felt a heavier pandemic burden across its staff.

When looking ahead to academic staff recruitment plans in the survey, all three university sector groups thought it very likely, at the time, that staffing would at least return to pre-pandemic levels (Figure 3.3).

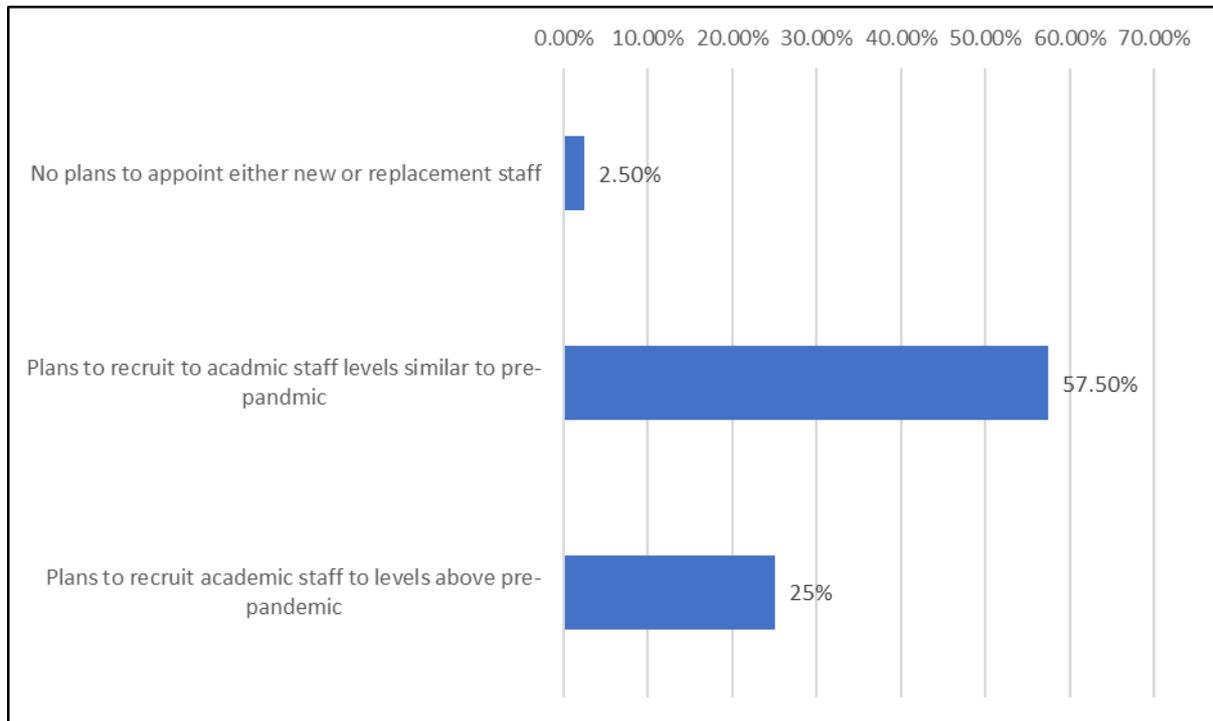


Figure 3.3 Respondents plans for recruiting social science staff over the next two years (based on 40 respondents).

However, the RG universities showed a stronger tendency to the view that staffing may exceed pre-pandemic levels (70% of respondents in that group), compared with Other Pre-92 (20% of respondents) and Post-92 (10% of respondents).

The HESA data shows that the ratio of students to staff increased in aggregate in social sciences across all three mission groups, from 2018-19 to 2020-21. The Russell Group aggregate average SSR rose from 19.5 to 20.1. This compares with 24.6 rising to 27.9 in Other Pre-92 institutions and 21.6 rising to 23.8 in Post-92 institutions.

Our survey in early 2022 showed that expected improvements in staff/student ratios were greater in RG respondents (58%), falling to just 17% perceiving that to be likely in Post-92 institutions.

Thus, a number of different reasons point to the likely greater disruptive impact of the pandemic on academic staff collectively in the Post-92 institutions and the likelihood of increasing differentiation between broad university sector groups.

4. Student recruitment and HEI impacts



Summary

Early pandemic fears of a collapse in both home and overseas student numbers, and associated funding, failed in general to materialise. Instead, many- but by no means all - institutions were confronted with an unanticipated bulge of students, including in the social sciences, in both 2020 and 2021 intakes. That brought its own pressures and challenges at the time and for the future.

The social sciences as a whole have emerged financially from the pandemic better than they had initially feared, but there remains a significant variation in the experiences of different institutions and different disciplines and a high level of financial dependence on overseas PGT income. Many identify an over-dependence on the Chinese PGT market and are attempting to diversify.

New financial clouds and volatility around student recruitment and fees loomed on the horizon in 2022 as the UK's exit from the EU continued to play out and HE policy changes were introduced when the government in Whitehall finally responded to the Augar review. These developments are considered further in section 6 and are a matter of widespread concern for the community. Looking ahead, we believe the outcome may well be greater differentiation in the HE sector in England in particular.

4.1 HE generic findings

4.1.1 Early pandemic fears and their mitigation

Our in-depth discussions highlighted the concern and speculation across the sector, following the initial lockdown in 2020, regarding a Covid-related collapse in home student numbers. Furthermore, as borders closed, and international travel was restricted there was also widespread concern that the pandemic would lead to a collapse in international student numbers.

Strategies to mitigate these fears, commonly reported in interviews with deans in early 2021, were for institutions to make more offers for the 2020 and 2021 intakes than they otherwise would have and, in some instances, instigate additional January start dates for PGT courses. (The rapid online teaching transformation discussed above provided the platform to retain current students and also to help reassure applicants.)

In addition to mitigation strategies led by institutions, three external forces are believed to have contributed generally to strong recruitment levels among home students, as reported:

1. A favourable change in demographics – figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2019), showed that the number of 18-year-olds in the UK started to rise in 2020 after years of steady decline, leading to an increase in the number of potential 18-year-old applicants to higher education.
2. Change to the A level marking system – 2020 and 2021 saw a change in how A-level grades were awarded in response to the pandemic and enforced home learning. The Department for Education (DfE) in conjunction with The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), which regulates qualifications, exams and assessments in England, decided that students who were due to sit their GCSE and A-Level exams would be awarded instead a 'calculated grade' by their teachers.

Such calculations, according to Ofqual (2020), resulted in more students in England obtaining grades at A and A* compared to 2019 (27.6% in 2020 compared with 25.2% in 2019). Similar patterns were evident in Wales, with those obtaining grades from A- to A* increasing from 27% in 2019 to 43.7% in 2020 (Qualifications Wales, 2020), and in Northern Ireland, with cumulative percentages of A and A* students increasing from 43.5% in 2019 to 62.9% in 2020 (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment, 2020). The grade inflation led to an increase in the number of students achieving places at higher tariff institutions and in the number of applications through clearing to HEIs. UCAS data show a 4% increase in the number of applications through clearing from 2019 (495,620) to 2020 (515,650) (UCAS undergraduate data release archive, n.d.).

3. The economic situation – with the initial lockdown and the instigation of the furlough scheme across the UK, many potential students will have been aware of limited job opportunities in the short term and possibly of longer-term labour market issues. These factors may have steered more potential students at both UG and PG levels to consider university as a more viable option. This pattern is well attested in the UK when cycles of economic downturn cause a restriction in the job market. For example, Holmes and Mayhew (2010) reported a sharp increase in overall university participation rates between 1989 and 1993 which coincided with the recession at the time.

With regards to international student recruitment, there were two additional factors that were likely to have influenced student numbers:

1. The introduction of a points-based immigration policy.
2. Following Brexit EU students wishing to study in the UK faced higher (international) fees from 2021-22 and no longer had access to tuition loans.

4.1.2 Student recruitment outcomes

Deans reported that for most institutions the initial fears over student recruitment to the social sciences did not materialise, and indeed many over-recruited because of A-level grading issues, leading to ‘bulge years’ in both 2020-21 and 2021-22 intakes.

The pattern of UG recruitment growth in the social sciences and in STEM is similar (Figure 4.1). It contrasts with the slight downturn in student numbers in ‘other sectors’, predominantly the arts and humanities. STEM (including medicine) saw a 10% increase in FTE undergraduate new entrants, to 251,645, between 2018-19 and 2020-21 (HESA data). The social sciences saw a 16% increase over the same period, to a total in 2020-21 of FTE undergraduate new entrants of 231,350. (Between 2019-20 and 2020-21, the increase was approximately 10%.)

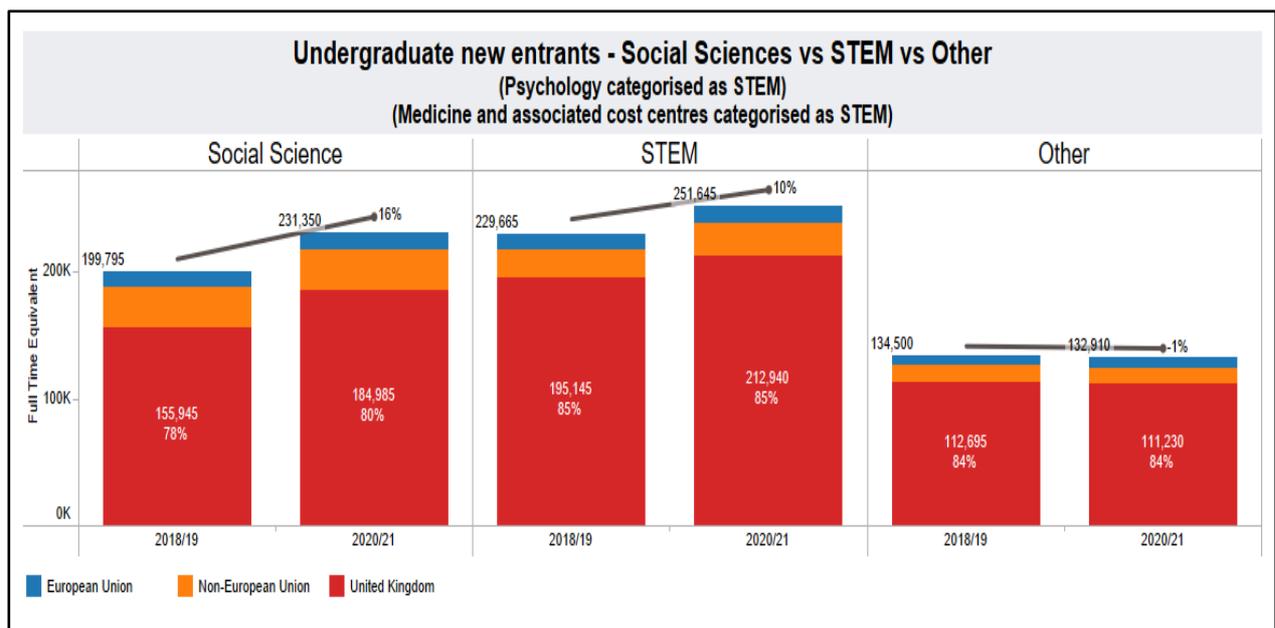


Figure 4.1 Comparison of FTE undergraduate new entrants across sectors, 2018/19 and 2020/21 (source, HESA).

Comparable HESA data for total PGT enrolments also show increases in both STEM and the social sciences, albeit with PGT students comprising a much higher proportion (22.5%) of the total FTE enrolments (806,070) in the social sciences. In STEM, total PGT enrolments rose from 59,735 (2018-19) to 82,685 (2020-21), an increase of 38% (22,950). In the social sciences enrolments rose by 24% from 133,310 to 165,550 (an increase of 32,240). Both social science and STEM also show an increase in the number of FTE students of international origin in the 2020-21 entry.

The position in Scotland and Northern Ireland is slightly different from the other UK nations owing to the different fee regime, whereby the devolved administrations pay the fees of their 'home nation' students. Places for students are number capped as a result. However, Scottish and Northern Irish institutions remain subject to the forces affecting other parts of the UK for students not domiciled in their territories.

4.1.3 Financial positions

HEIs commonly reported that their institutional financial positions were 'broadly' where they had expected them to be pre-Covid, owing mainly to the unexpectedly strong recruitment across both national and international markets. In addition, some noted savings in international travel and reduced estate costs. The outturn for many was far better than feared in early to mid 2020. As reported by Baker (2022a), where institutional financial losses did occur, they arose mainly from reductions in revenue from student accommodation rentals, catering and conferences.

Most institutions, while welcoming their current financial positions, also expressed concerns in both the quantitative survey and the focus groups over their financial futures. These are explored in section 6.

4.2 Social science specific findings

4.2.1 Student recruitment in 2021-22

The overview of student recruitment to the social sciences in 2020-21 is set out in comparison with STEM in section 4.1.2 above.

HESA data for 2021-22 student recruitment will not be available until early 2023. In the absence of that, data from the questionnaire survey (Figure 4.2a) provide a useful indication of student entry for social science at all levels, compared with pre-Covid plans for 2021-22

The figure clearly demonstrates the impacts of both the pandemic lasting into the 2021-22 recruitment year for home UG students and the effects of the UK exit from the EU. First year home undergraduate entry was greater than planned for 58% of respondents and lower than planned for 18% and this was despite the fact that some universities were known to have increased their offer grades for 2021-22. Home PGT, in contrast, shows a preponderance of 'similar to' or 'lower' than planned intakes. International PGT shows the greatest volatility between institutions: while 47% report greater than plan, 36% report lower than planned intakes in 2021-22. First year international undergraduate entry, PGCE and PGR entries appeared broadly on plan when viewed across all the institutions responding.

EU undergraduate and PGT entries were both reported in the survey as lower than plan in the majority of responding institutions: 65% and 53%, respectively. None reported numbers greater than planned (Figure 4.2a). The qualitative responses in interviews and focus groups are consistent with survey findings. While some respondents mentioned slight reductions in EU student intake, others referred to '*an almost total collapse*'.

From the 2021-22 intake, EU students were required to pay international fee rates rather than 'home' fees. HESA data for 2021-22 (available early in 2023) will not therefore give a definitive answer to how EU students have responded to the UK exit from the EU, as they will be categorised as 'international'. HESA data from 2020-21, unsurprisingly, compared with 2018-19, showed only a marginal decrease in EU nationals in total social science enrolments (fewer than 300 students).

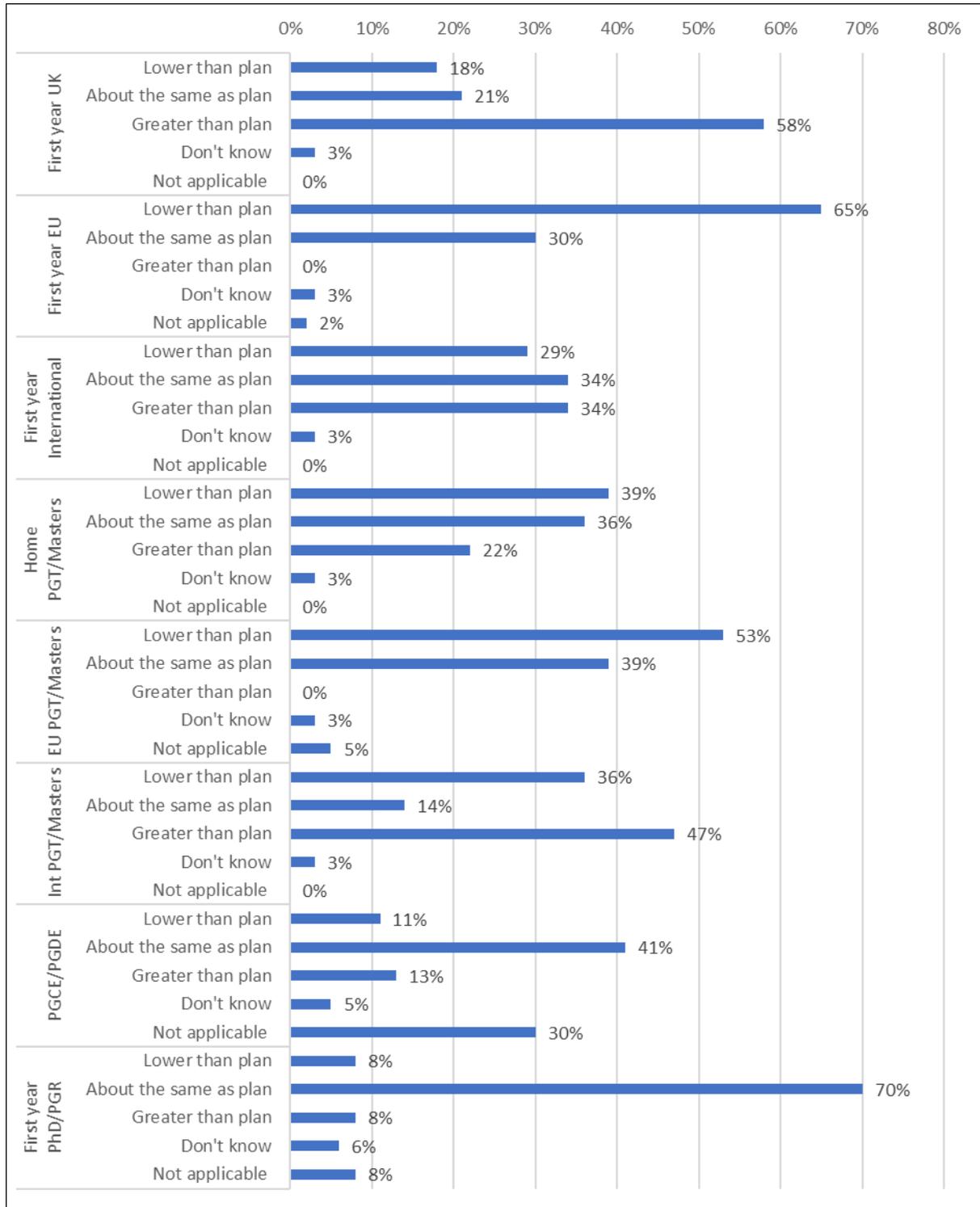


Figure 4.2a Indicative student entry for 2021-22 (percentage of question respondents agreeing with statements relating to student entry numbers for 2021-22 for social science subjects. N = 36 to 38 for each of these questions).

In contrast, international (non-EU) student numbers reportedly remained buoyant in many institutions and especially in those with higher international profiles and rankings (based on focus group responses). We heard repeatedly that the financial gap created by declining numbers of EU students was to a large extent filled by international recruitment to PGTs, particularly from China.

Overall, the interviews and focus groups responses characterised 2019-20 as a period of initial growth; 2020-21 as the first and unexpected 'bulge' year; and 2021-22 as a continuation of higher than previously planned intake levels in many institutions. Increases were driven largely by home first year students and international (non-EU) PGT students.

However, not all institutions were in this fortunate position – there were losers as well as winners. 18% of survey respondents indicated first year home student enrolment in the social sciences fell below planned levels and 36% reported international PGT recruitment lower than planned in the social sciences. These responses are especially important in a period when universities were more dependent than ever on income from both sources and in the face of changing higher education policy on fees in 2022 (see section 6).

4.2.2 Future recruitment signals

In terms of UK student recruitment, the focus group discussions indicated that institutions that had experienced a 'bulge' were now facing a strategic decision as to whether to retain student recruitment numbers close to the 'new' high pandemic levels or to return to lower numbers in line with plans before the pandemic. This issue is considered in section 6 on future challenges.

The expectation in the focus groups was that student recruitment from the EU was likely to continue to decline steadily to a new low base-level.

The issue of international students was frequently raised in interviews and discussions, because of the social sciences' strong recruitment of international PGT students, their relatively high proportion of total enrolments, and the positive financial contribution this returns, in multiple ways, to institutions. Many noted this differentiated the social sciences from other sectors. Most respondents expressed concerns about their over-reliance on the Chinese student market, for several reasons:

1. The willingness and/or freedom of such students to travel to the UK.

2. The pandemic fuelling a desire to remain at home with online teaching.
3. The increasing competition for them from other nations.
4. The growth in PGT higher education provision in China.

Many noted, in the focus groups, that attempts at diversification aimed at reducing the over-reliance risk have borne some fruit. An upturn in students from India was frequently cited, facilitated in part by recent changes to visa regulations. Greater interest (but still small numbers) from the USA was reported; as was the emergence of new markets in Nigeria and parts of the Middle East (UAE in particular). However, it was noted that this raised new challenges, including the students' familiarity and use of the English language, problems with academic literacy practices which, in a cross-cultural context, could lead to allegations of plagiarism, and the overall level of academic support such students required. No one suggested that they would be seeking to reduce their international PGT cohort. Some indicated an aspiration to grow numbers further, to help offset financial losses, or anticipated losses from other operations.

4.2.3 Discipline perspectives

Student enrolments, and hence relative financial health, is not uniform across the constituent disciplines of the social sciences. There is evidence too that differentiation has widened for some disciplines over the pandemic years. That is clear, and largely consistent, from all four lines of evidence we drew upon.

HESA data on undergraduate student enrolments by social science subject (including psychology) can be seen in Figure 4.2b, for the comparative years of 2018-19 and 2020-21. The numerical pre-eminence of business and management studies is evident on every dimension of the figure: scale of total new enrolments (92,860); proportion of international student enrolments (21% in 2020-21) and EU enrolments; and overall growth in annual enrolments over the two-year period, by 15,960 (20.75%).

Alongside business and management, law and sociology showed the highest increases in absolute numbers of undergraduate FTE student enrolments; and education saw the greatest proportional increase, albeit from a relatively low absolute number. The remaining disciplines saw moderate (7-15%) to modest (<7%) upturns in FTE numbers.

Not one of the social science disciplines saw declining absolute numbers of FTE new entrants between the two years, although relative proportions of the total social science intake will have fallen in some cases.

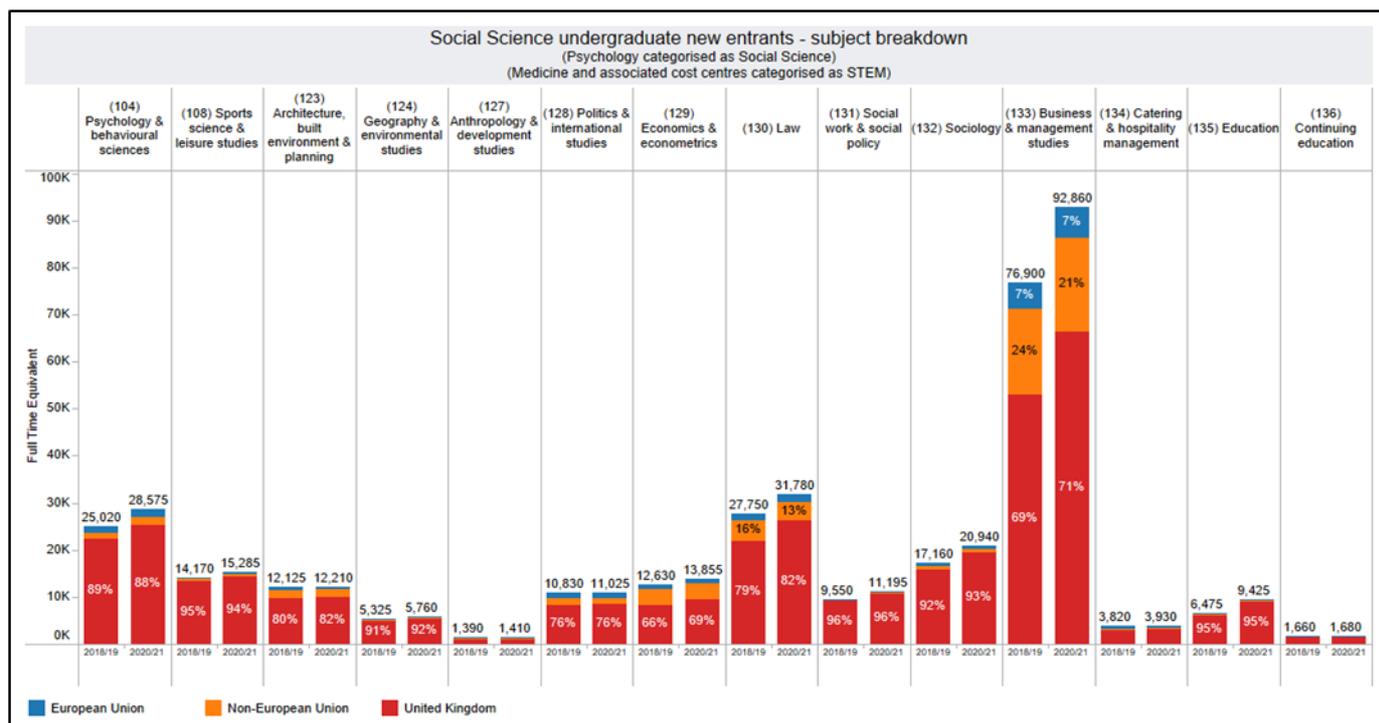


Figure 4.2b Number of undergraduate new entrants from the UK, EU and International (Non-EU) in 2018/19 and 2020/21 across the social science disciplines (source, HESA).

In exploring the reasons behind this pattern of change in the focus groups and interviews, two main points emerged. First, the enduring demand by international students for UG and PG qualifications in the ‘professions’ of business and management, law and economics. More than one respondent used the term ‘cash cow’ when referring to business and management studies. In the 2020-21 intake, nearly 20,000 international students enrolled in UG business and management courses. Others pointed out that some subjects – such as linguistics and geography for example – have less name recognition with international students.

In a similar vein, the tentative indications are of more home undergraduate students appearing to choose courses that have a vocational aspect or are more obviously linked to professions and employability. **Action 4:** This is an area that

would benefit from monitoring in coming years as it has the capacity to reshape the social sciences in HE. It is also potentially an area in which more could be done to demonstrate the many employment opportunities across all the social sciences.

Importantly, we received no systematic feedback that suggested a consistent move across institutions to cut back on those disciplines in the social sciences that were growing less strongly or in a 'weaker' financial position. Indeed, several institutions noted that the strength of recruitment in some areas of the social sciences puts them in a strong position which enables a level of cross-subsidy between social science disciplines in a faculty. However, our sample was weighted towards the Russell Group and Other Pre-92 institutions. (A small number of Post-92 institutions have recently announced redundancies that include some social science.)

4.2.4 Institutional cross subsidies

This was a financial issue frequently mentioned in interviews and focus groups, whereby the social science faculty or school is required to pay a higher proportional top slice than STEM and other sectors to their university central funds. This is not a new issue, and it varies according to institutional financial models and strategies for growth. It was viewed by some respondents as an inhibiting factor for the sustainable growth and development of the social sciences; others perceived that it put the social sciences in a strong institutional position. **Action 5:** This is another area that may benefit from monitoring, especially as the recent HE policy changes on fees may alter this capacity for cross subsidy which may, in turn, change the standing of the social sciences within some HEIs.

4.2.5 Financial position – summary

In general, the current financial picture for the social sciences, as presented in responses to the survey and in the focus groups, was healthier than anticipated early in the Covid cycle for the reasons considered above. For example, in the survey (Winter 2020/21), when asked about the financial position of the social sciences in their institution, around 60% of question respondents viewed their position as strong or very strong both before the pandemic and during the pandemic. Almost all the rest viewed their position as 'middling'.

Furthermore, and maybe somewhat prematurely in retrospect, some respondents were anticipating further strengthening of that position in the next two to three

years. However, that was by no means the case in all institutions. Concerns for the future are considered in section 6.

4.3 University sector specific findings

4.3.1 Student recruitment

All three sector groups experienced an increase in total FTE social science enrolments between 2018-19 and 2020-21 (source, HESA). In the Russell Group they rose by 22,385 students; by 29,600 in the Other Pre-92 group; and by 59,465 in the Post-92 group where there are significantly more institutions (Figure 4.3a). The figure also shows how recruitment at different levels of study varies across the university sector groups.

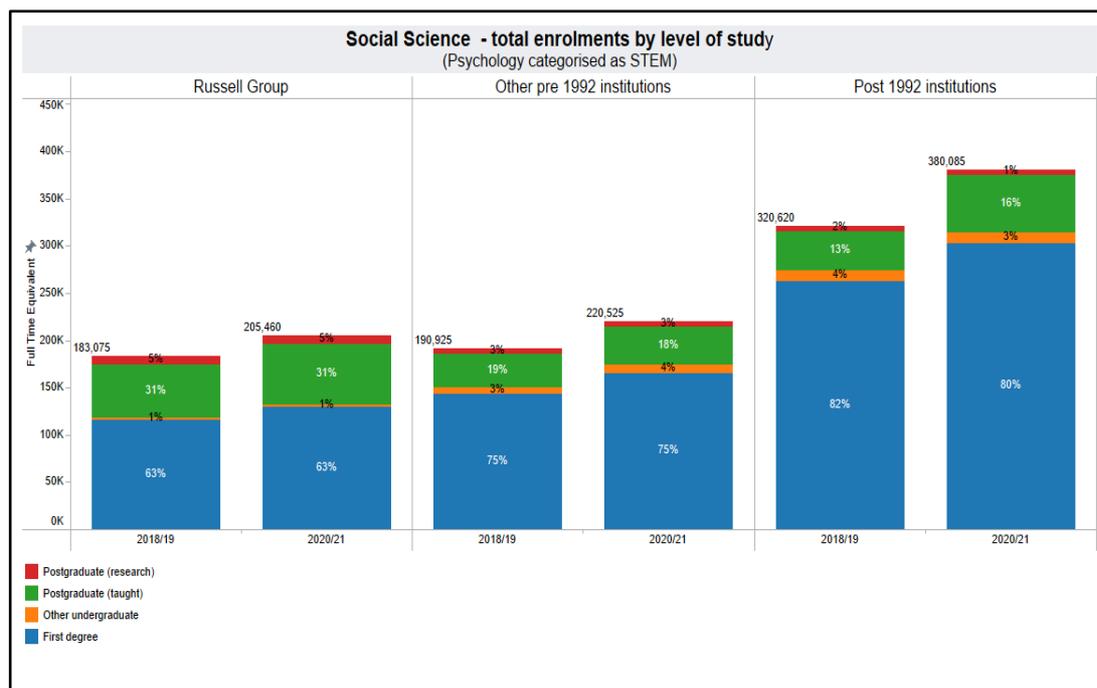


Figure 4.3a 2018-19 and 2020-21 comparison of total social science enrolments by level of study and university sector group (source HESA)

For 2021-22, our survey data indicate that the Russell Group institutions appeared to benefit most consistently from home undergraduate student intakes in social sciences that were greater than plan (Figure 4.3b). Whereas in the other sector groups institutions recruited more variably in relation to planned levels. As our sample covered about 40% of the population, it is possible that this is also an artefact of sampling, especially for the Post-92 institutions.

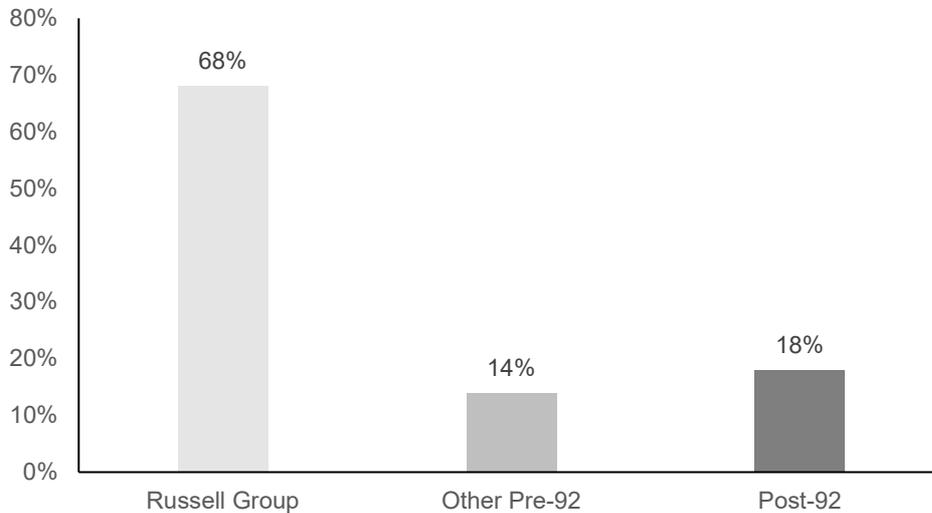


Figure 4.3b. The split between groups of the 22 HEIs that indicated home UG recruitment levels greater than planned in social sciences, 2021-22.

A similar pattern of differentiation between university groups, but less extreme, is present in reported reductions in EU enrolments to UG and PGT courses in 2021-22. As yet, based on our data, there is insufficient evidence to support the predictions made by Baker (2022,c) that institutions experiencing the largest falls in EU acceptances are most likely to be Post-92 universities.

For prior years, HESA data confirms that declines in absolute numbers of EU PGT students were minimal between 2018-19 and 2020-21 in all university groups. This is unsurprising as the requirement for EU nationals to pay international fee rates only came into effect from 2021-22. However, the EU student proportion of the total enrolments fell as home and international student numbers expanded (Figure 4.3c).

4.3.2 Student quality on entry

In late 2020 the Office for Students (OfS, 2020) published its proposals for regulation of quality and standards under section B3 of the regulatory framework for English higher education. The OfS set minimum thresholds on the three key outcomes of *continuation*, *completion* and *progression*. When looking at full-time, first-degree students the threshold is 80 per cent retention after the first year, 75 per cent course completion, and 60 per cent progression to either graduate-level employment or an equivalent successful outcome, such as postgraduate study.

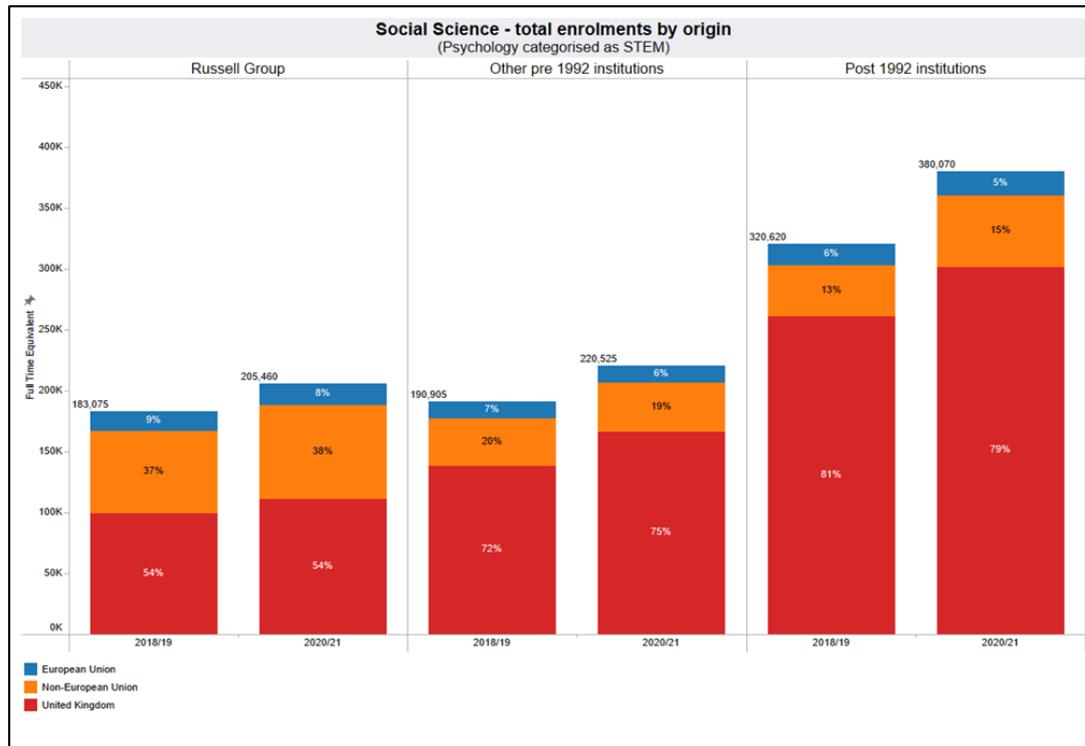


Figure 4.3c. Total social science student enrolments by origin for the three university groups (source HESA).

More A Level (and Scottish Highers) students met target entry grades for higher tariff institutions, owing to grade inflation in 2020 and 2021. Many respondents commented on the ‘upwards drift’ of students. Some concerns were raised in the interviews and in focus groups from Other Pre-92 and Post-92 institutions about the resulting quality of students available to their institutions, at this time, compared with prior years. This ‘gravitational effect’ may present issues for some institutions in their reporting against newly introduced OfS measures (see section 6). It is particularly pertinent to the social sciences given the relatively high proportion of students in the Post-92 group.

Over and above that, unanticipated volatility has been introduced into the system from grade inflation. New OfS regulatory measures and continued fee freezes may add to that. And we are yet to see how the system readjusts to the return to external A level and Scottish Highers assessment in summer 2022. **Action 6:** In light of these uncertainties we suggest monitoring student intakes: in particular the Post-92 institutions given their large UG social science numbers and the higher tariff institutions for the balance of UK and international students.

4.3.3 Financial position

The general perception among those we interviewed was that the Russell Group institutions have greater financial resilience and hence a greater and faster recovery capacity. The survey responses indicate some support for this too (see Figure 4.3d) in that more of the Russell Group respondents agree that social science in their institution is in a strong or very strong financial position, pre-Covid, in 2022 and likely to be over the next few years. **Please note however that the survey was completed prior to the round of Whitehall announcements on HE policy in Spring 2022 and the worsening position regarding EU funding.** Perceptions of the future in the focus groups held later, were not as positive regarding the future.

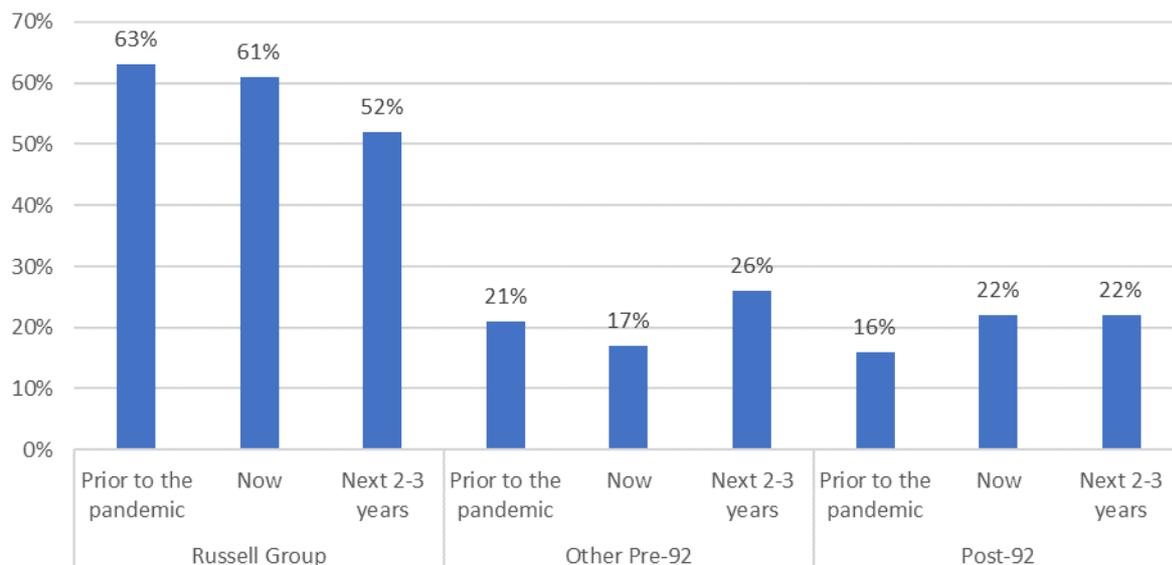


Figure 4.3d. Proportion of respondents by sector agreeing that 'social science in their institution is in a strong or very strong position' (N = 19, 18, 23, respectively).

The apparent rise in optimism for the future in some Other Pre-92 and Post-92 HEIs is too small to be definitive on a sample of this size. However, it is certainly the case that there remain some institutions under financial pressure and seeking to diversify income sources. We are starting to see announcements of course closures, mergers and likely redundancies in parts of the Post-92 university group. Recent announcements at De Montfort, Wolverhampton and Roehampton universities include some redundancies for social sciences; though arts and humanities will generally be more affected (UCU, 2022).

4.3.4 Future financial risks

All institutions responding to the survey perceived risks to exist to the social sciences from HE policy changes that were announced in Spring 2022. The majority perceived there to be ‘some risk’ but between a third and a quarter of respondents perceived the risks to be large.

The university groups are differentiated in their responses. This differentiation emerged in both the survey data and focus groups. The questions were posed as hypothetical as the survey and focus groups took place before the policy announcements, and that may have influenced responses.

HEI Sector	Freezing student fees at current levels	Employability outcomes a condition of funding	Minimum entry grades
Russell Group	42%	14%	12%
Other Pre-92	33%	29%	25%
Post-92	25%	57%	63%

Table 4.3e University group differentiation over policy changes they perceive as having a large impact on the social sciences. (N = 12, 7 and 8 respectively).

Of those who perceived the policy changes to present a large risk to the social sciences, the Russell Group institutions concerns focused almost entirely on the freezing of fees. In contrast, Post-92 institutions concerns focused on employability outcomes and minimum entry grades policies. Other Pre-92 institutions fell between these two. Table, 4.3e summarises the survey responses. The low N values, inevitable when using cross tabs on a sample of this size, are confirmed by a similar pattern of responses in the focus group discussions. Policy responses are further considered in section 6.

5. Research and research continuity



Summary

Widespread disruption to research time and research activity was noted across the sector as a by-product of the pressures of coping with the heavy pandemic demands in teaching and learning, student support, home-working and caring. The impacts are reported as complex and highly differentiated between individuals, and with three groups being especially affected. For some the pandemic period was highly research productive. For many others it was not and there remain some reported challenges in building early careers and, at mid-career levels, rebuilding research pipelines and making up for lost time in research planning, grant applications and research innovation.

The research settings and methodologies in the social sciences exacerbated the more generic pandemic issues. In addition, it remains to be seen if the higher ratio of female to male colleagues in the social sciences compared with STEM will also lead to a disproportionate effect, albeit with a few notable discipline exceptions.

Mitigating activities by institutions and new avenues of research funding relating to Brexit and to the pandemic, especially from UKRI/ESRC, were widely regarded as beneficial. There are indications too that the pandemic demands and restrictions may have furthered changes in research ethos, attitudes and confidence in the social sciences.

The emerging and overwhelming concern towards the end of the project was that of future funding for UK research in the social sciences, so that they may retain their high world standing and play their full role in contributing to understanding and managing some of the challenges facing the UK and globally. The social sciences run a very serious risk of a disproportionately high reduction in total research funding, largely owing to losses in ODA funding and access challenges to EU Horizon funding in a setting with a relatively small funding 'pot'.

5.1 HE generic findings

5.1.1 Research time

With the heavy time demands of implementing and delivering online teaching and assessment and additional student support, all respondents – in the interviews, survey and focus groups – reported a decrease in research time for many, but not all, academic colleagues across their institution. Other non-research related work and personal responsibilities accentuated this problem for some staff (Section 3).

This is consistent with the initial report from BEIS (2020) which showed that around 90% of respondents indicated their research had been delayed as a consequence

of the pandemic. However, the follow-up report from UKRI (2021b) indicated that almost half of those with research responsibilities had returned to their pre-Covid level of research effort. Nevertheless, a large proportion (80%) agreed with the notion that Covid had forced them to change the way they do their research, making it difficult to plan ahead, with a substantial proportion (40%) being forced to change the direction of their research. Three-quarters of researchers indicated a likely mid to long-term negative impact on their research as they had been unable to plan and/or build collaborations.

5.1.2 Differential impacts

There was also a consensus in our study that, of the research community, PGR students and ECRs were particularly highly impacted by the pandemic, both in terms of the logistical challenges of conducting research in a Covid world and more personal issues of increased anxiety and isolation. Concerns were also raised about the loss of softer networking opportunities for PGR/ECR staff and that the lack of interaction with peers at conference/international meetings may negatively impact their level of confidence as well as their ability to establish themselves in their chosen fields.

These findings are consistent with wider surveys showing that PGRs were most heavily affected by the lack of access to research facilities forcing almost half of them to change the direction of their research, and that both PGR and ECRs were more likely to experience job insecurity (BEIS, 2020, UKRI, 2021b).

Female colleagues were also cited in our study as often more highly impacted in light of often greater caring and schooling responsibilities. This too has been independently reported (e.g., Gewin, 2020; Peetz et al., 2022; Shamseer et al., 2021).

5.1.3 Institutional mitigation

Many reported institutions instigating mitigation strategies for PGRs, ECRs and academic colleagues in general. For PGRs and ECRs, we heard frequent reference to funded (where possible) research extensions, and reduced expectations in terms of research scope and productivity, including the level of ambition being lowered in PhDs as a response to the pandemic challenges. Cohort building strategies were also referenced and student (and staff) welfare support services were frequently reported as being enhanced. While this is consistent with

the earlier survey by BEIS (2020) which showed that the majority of respondents agreed that their employer had supported them during lockdown, it is important to note that the follow-up survey by UKRI (2021b) indicated that PGRs were still feeling left behind in terms of getting their work done. This was reflected in their mental health.

All respondents reported widespread institutional support for the social sciences and confidence in the sector over this period. There was little evidence of institutions prioritising one sector above another in their pandemic responses, other than reports by some respondents of an emphasis on efforts to re-open wet labs in order to support research and PGRs in STEM disciplines.

5.1.4 Research funding

Concerns over limitations and access to research funding were universally raised. Paramount amongst the concerns, following Brexit, was that of uncertainty regarding access to future EU Horizon funding. While access issues would impact across academic sectors, particular issues were raised for the social sciences, as considered in the next section.

This is particularly important given that the UK was often a net beneficiary of EU funding and held, among participating countries in Horizon 2020, the biggest share of signed grants from the research and innovation framework programme (Lenihan & Witherspoon, 2016). Loss of such funding could also have significant impacts on research outputs given that 60% of the UK's internationally co-authored research papers were found to be with EU partners (Amin & Lewis, 2017).

An unconnected concern that emerged during the project was the announcement of the decision to cut the ODA budget, which impacted on the UKRI's portfolio of Global Challenges Research Fund grants, among others. The social sciences performed strongly in this programme and had, as a result, a high exposure to this cut. Our survey respondents expressed deep regret and concern regarding the impact of the cut on the social sciences (see the next section).

5.1.5 Research dividends

Despite the significant challenges arising from the pandemic lockdown and exit from the EU, respondents also remarked on potential research dividends. The most commonly identified were:

- 'Functional' interactions being improved and digital networks being extended, especially internationally, through online meetings and conferences. The growth in use of digital networks was noted as offering potential for developing greater international collaboration. This was seen as a particular benefit for younger members of staff who may be more familiar with online technologies and communications and who probably lacked access to funds for face-to-face interaction on a similar scale; and in situations where links had already been established.
- Access to research training being improved and extended, for example to research students not in receipt of grants, by the requirement to move training online.
- Increased awareness of the ability of funders, universities and research staff to respond rapidly and flexibly to situational events. This was seen in the rapid response calls put out by UKRI focusing on the impact of Covid and the ability of institutions and research staff to respond quickly and efficiently, identifying targeted projects and delivering on them.

Hence, it is likely that the way research is and can be conducted has changed and that an inherent flexibility along with a greater use of technology may open up new avenues of collaboration and new opportunities for training.

5.2 Social science specific findings

The generic points above, raised by social scientists in our study and arising from the experiences within their faculties and schools, are not thought to be specific to the social sciences. However, additional, more social science specific, nuances on these themes also emerged:

5.2.1 Research time and differential impacts

Respondents frequently commented on how the nature of research in the social sciences, its methodologies and data sources, and the settings in which it is

conducted were considered to have contributed greatly to a negative impact on some postgraduate research students (PGR) and early career researchers (ECR) in particular.

The settings cited by respondents included:

- PGRs in the social sciences are more often self-funded and would have to self-fund any necessary extensions.
- Some work independently rather than as part of a large team, and hence lack the support structures of teams; and their research often focuses on a more personally developed topic as opposed to a pre-determined one.

Some common modes of data collection, and data sources, in the social sciences were referenced very frequently as presenting barriers to research during the pandemic. The following were identified as problematic, and in many cases impossible, to pursue during lockdown:

- Working with non-digitized archives
- Fieldwork and other site-based research, in the UK and internationally
- Qualitative data collection requiring face to face interactions
- Work involving vulnerable participants

Others, less frequently cited, were none-the-less important to the individuals concerned. They included lack of access to labs for lab-based social sciences and difficulties working on highly secure secondary data sources, which often requires in-person presence at least in the initial stages (permissions for the latter were also noted as taking exceptionally long times to process in lockdown). UKRI (2021b) also noted an inability to undertake fieldwork as a specific barrier to research for respondents from REF panel C (the social sciences).

While the barriers referred to above were not specific to PGRs and ECRs, the studies they were engaged upon are typically time-bound and they are less likely than established researchers to have the experience, confidence, resources or agency to make adjustments. For example, it is hard to shift a project fundamentally one year into a PhD.

Some also commented on methodologically-driven, differential impacts with respect to disciplines. This is likely to apply both to different disciplines (for example compare geography and economics) and to different research areas

within disciplines (compare census data driven research in quantitative social geography with community-based research in cultural geography, for example).

All respondents identified the affected 'pandemic' cohort of PGRs and ECRs as at risk of suffering career detriment. Multiple reasons were identified, including:

- Having to reconfigure research in the early PhD stages
- Enduring delays in pursuing research when part way through a project
- A reduced ability to build 'soft' networks and collaborations
- A lack of time to publish
- Isolation
- Resulting higher levels of anxiety and lack of confidence

It was in relation to PRGs and ECRs that respondents specifically requested that ESRC consider implementing a 'Covid cohort' programme to help those affected overcome some of the barriers and get their research careers back on track. Several praised the ESRC's recent temporary increase in the number of post-doctoral Fellowships, seeing even short term (6 month) Fellowships as highly beneficial to this cohort. **Action 7:** The career development of the ECR/PGR pandemic cohort would also benefit from monitoring as respondents felt that the full impacts on these groups will take time to play out.

Almost all respondents identified a second group in the social sciences for whom the pandemic presented especial challenges in terms of their research and research continuity in 2020 and 2021. These were mid-career researchers and particularly those who found themselves having to juggle family caring and schooling responsibilities, significant departmental or other administrative responsibilities, the pressures of teaching transformations, supporting PhD students in adjusting their research and student welfare more generally, with sustaining research. While this list is not gender specific, mid-career female colleagues may, as a group, be more vulnerable than males given the larger burden of caring and schooling responsibilities often falling to them.

The commonly stated impacts were in not having the time to:

- Maintain continuity in current research programmes
- Conceive, plan and pilot new research projects

- Apply for research funding
- Grow new research agendas and collaborations

These issues may well have short to medium term impacts not only on individual careers but also on the research pipeline and research innovation. **Action 8:** We suggest the ongoing impacts on the mid-career cohort in terms of research continuity and innovation is another area worth monitoring over the medium term. **Action 9:** We also suggest that pandemic gender impacts in the social sciences would benefit from further detailed study, not least given some of the pre-existing gender inequalities and the high proportions of women academics in the social sciences.

The fact that some colleagues had a 'good Covid' was also often reported. This presented as more time to think and for research, high levels of research productivity and publishing, and continuing applications for research funding. These individuals were identified as more likely to exhibit some or all of the following characteristics:

- Be established colleagues
- Be currently unencumbered by children or other caring responsibilities
- Have a good infrastructure at home
- Have fewer teaching responsibilities

One respondent suggested this differentiation might result in a worsening of existing inequalities.

The aggregate responses in the survey support a mixed picture on research across the institutions that responded (Figure 5.2a). 58% indicated a decrease in research time / activity. Just under a half reported an increase in research grant submissions and almost a quarter indicated a reduction in submissions. Reference to decreases in research time and reductions in grant submissions featured more commonly in focus group comments, whereas ESRC has reported no impact of the pandemic on their research grant application levels. This mixed picture, combined with the points made from some institutions about programmes to support some colleagues kick-start research post pandemic lockdowns, suggests **(Action 10)** this may be an area worth monitoring for any medium-term impacts and to understand among which communities of scholars and institutions lasting impacts are most felt.

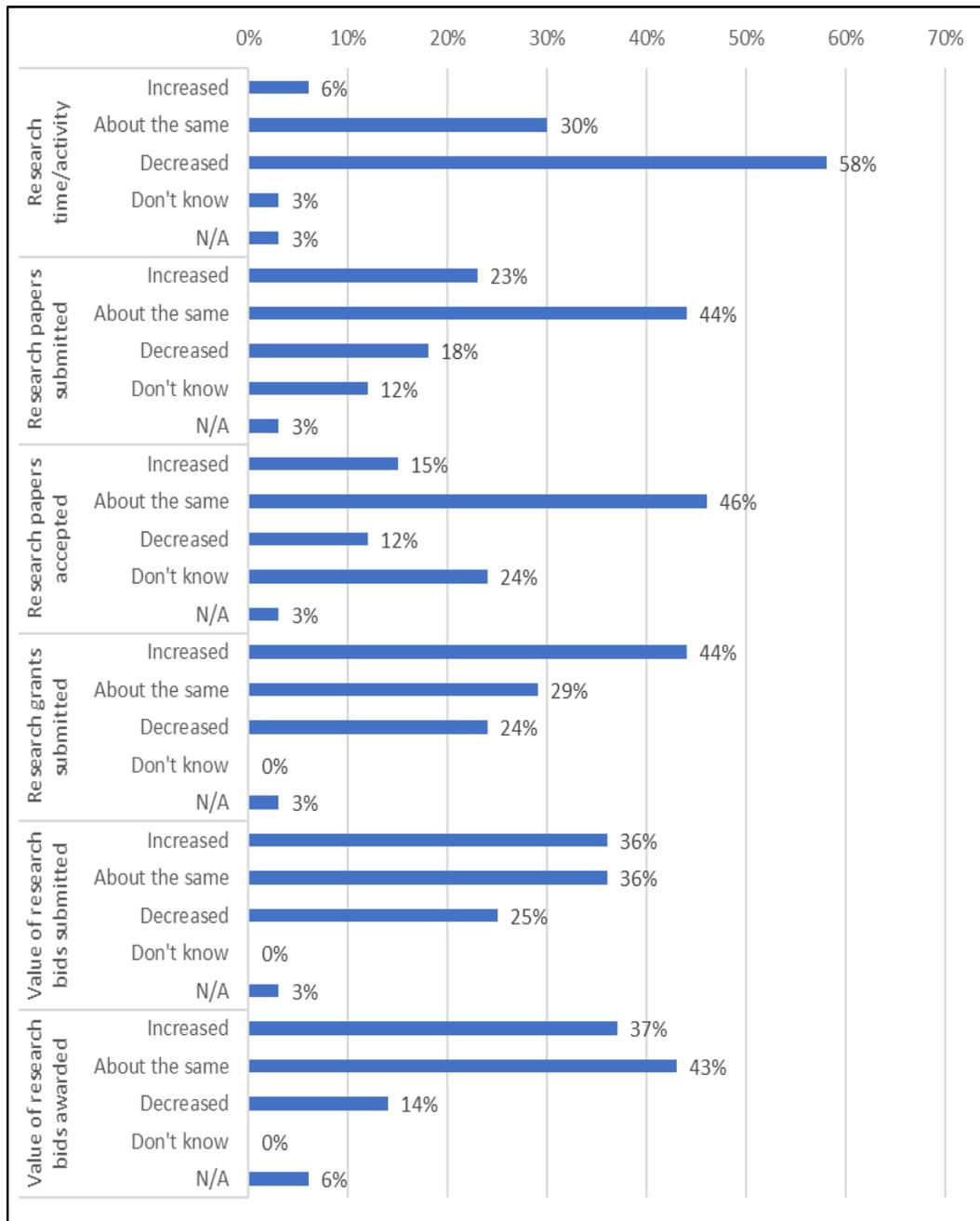


Figure 5.2a Percentage of respondents indicating how social science research had fared since the beginning of 2020, compared to the previous 2 years (N = 33 to 35 on each question).

In summary, a complex and differentiated picture of impacts on social science research and research continuity emerges from our work. These are not best captured by aggregate responses. Variations in pandemic impact relate to the

intersections of individual circumstances; career stage and range of non-research responsibilities; gender; discipline, sub-discipline and research methodologies employed. These variables will intersect and play out differently for individuals, across disciplines, and across institutions.

5.2.2 Mitigations

Institutional, faculty and individual adjustments were widely implemented, according to our study, for both PGR and ECRs and more generally for staff.

In the social sciences, this included the use of targeted support funds to pump prime research, strategies to support cohort building and networking initiatives, flexible working allocations, and Covid extensions. More widely, UKRI noted 61% of their survey respondents (not social science specific) had made enquiries of funders about additional funding or extensions owing to the pandemic (UKRI, 2021b).

Some deans also reported implementing imaginative measures in social sciences to support colleagues in social sciences in changing research directions during lockdown. For example, refocusing and expanding digital research platforms so that staff could make more use of secondary data resources, including those from long-term social data projects led by the university.

While pre-planned research leave was often cancelled in the early days of the pandemic, most report that it has been re-instated since, with those whose leave was cancelled taking precedence in the queue.

The need to support some colleagues in kick starting research again, as circumstances return more to normal, also came up in several recent focus group discussions.

5.2.3 Research funding and collaboration

A summary of aggregate research grant income to the social sciences in real terms between 2013-14 and 2019-20, is presented in Figure 5.2b (derived from HESA data for REF Panel C UoAs). In 2019-20, research grant income (adjusted to 2020-21 real prices) dropped to £555m (the same as that in 2016-17) from a high of £571m in each of the previous two years. We await the next financial data release from HESA for 2020-21 which will allow us to study this trend further.

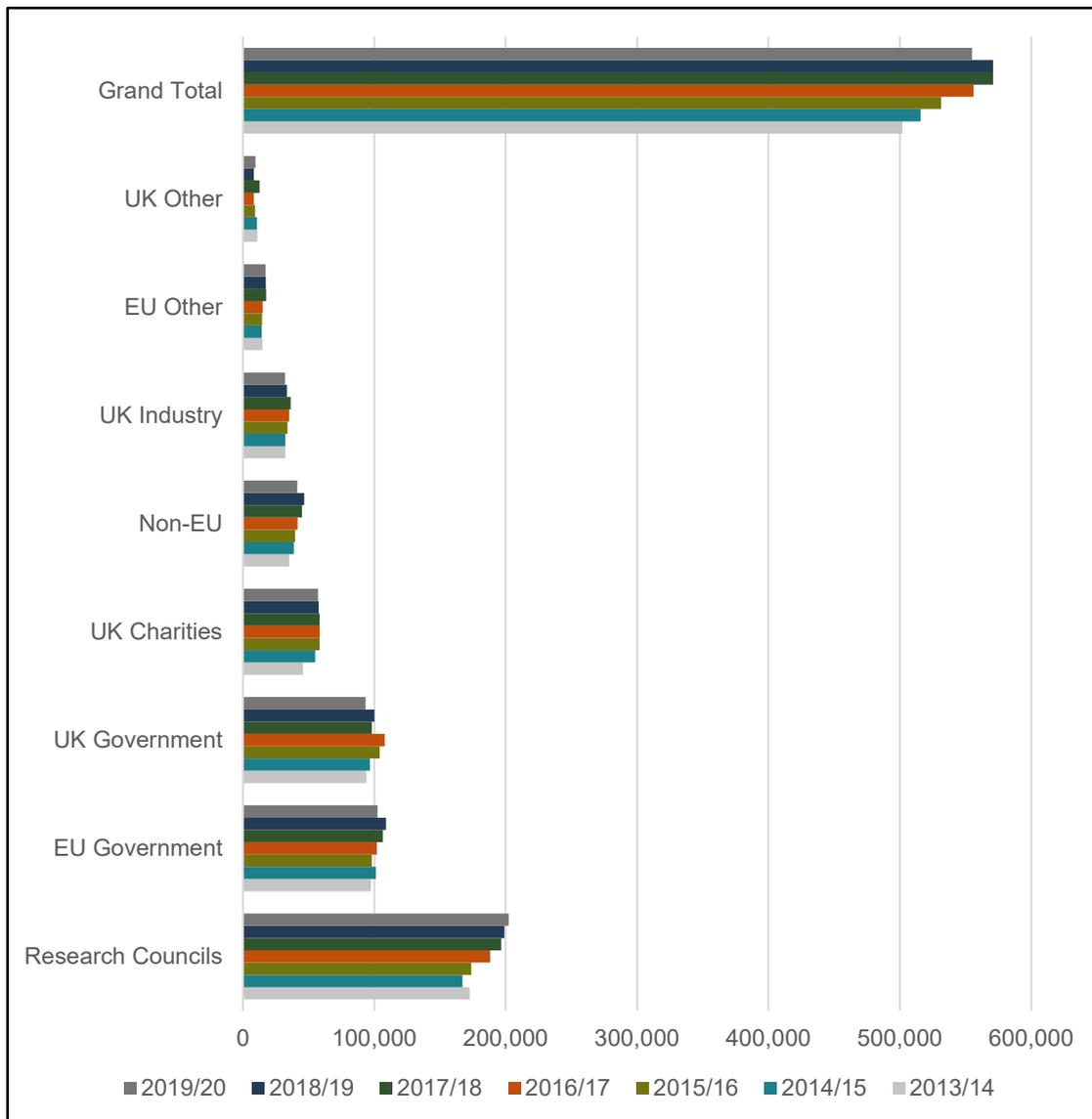


Figure 5.2b. Research grant income by source (£000), 2013-14 to 2019-20 REF Panel C UoAs (adjusted to 2020-21 prices).

From 2014-15 to 2019-20 research grant income to the social sciences from UK Research Councils/UKRI showed a welcome modest increase in real terms from £167m pa to £202m pa over the five years. The value of research grant income from the EU government overtook that of the UK Government grant funding from 2017-18, with this source rising to second place in terms of total value of grants awarded. In 2019-20, EU grant income accounted for 18.5% of total research grant income awarded to the social sciences. The independently reported overall decline in the proportion of EU Horizon 2020 funds received by the UK since 2016 (see

context section) is less obvious in terms of income to university social sciences over this period, although 2019-20 saw a decline from the peak of 2018-19. Income from UK charities remained flat, accounting for 10% of the total in each year.

All our focus group respondents expressed serious concerns about future funding research opportunities in the social sciences. The depth of concern over access to EU Horizon funding for research and innovation is not surprising given its contribution in recent years to the total grant funding received by the sector, and the fact that the social sciences often did disproportionately well in those competitions (Hantrais & Lenihan, 2016). The EU Horizon programme in 2021-2027 has a budget of Euro 95bn and a strong commitment to social science.

Softer, non-financial impacts were also reported with respect to collaborations on EU research grant applications. Many commented upon a marked (negative) shift in attitudes towards them among EU partners and former collaborators, and more widely in institutional collaborations. This led to some universities taking what they perceive as a 'risk mitigation' strategy by developing bi-lateral international partnerships or establishing satellites in EU countries. Researchers faced a deadline of 29 June 2022 to secure a host institution inside the EU or potentially lose their ERC grant. According to the report by Upton (2022), of the 143 UK-based applicants across the ERC's range of grant calls only two had told the funder they will stay in the UK and so far, 16 have said they would move with their grants.

The incentives for partner EU institutions to seek collaborations with UK colleagues was identified as likely to change following Brexit as early as 2016 (Lenihan & Witherspoon, 2016). Given the ongoing uncertainties there is likely to be a large reduction in the number of UK social scientists collaborating on and leading EU-funded projects. Focus group respondents indicated some staff are moving to academic positions in Europe as a result. Amin and Lewis (2017) suggested early on that this could in due course jeopardize the UK's world-leading research excellence in the social sciences.

The generic impact (in the likely event it happens) of dropping out of access to EU research grant funding, and the implementation of whatever its UK replacement may (or may not) be, will undoubtedly be researched widely. **Action 11:** The impact in social science in particular on research outputs, innovation and collaborations, and the health of the social sciences more generally, deserves future research attention.

The loss of ODA funding and its support for collaborative, applied research in the developing world was widely noted, with dismay. Many respondents pointed to the wider implications for international reputation, contractual commitments, sustaining long term research partnerships, and for beneficiaries and interdisciplinary research itself. Evidence was given that where cuts fell it has led to a curtailment in collaborations and partnerships that were the outcome of cumulative or combined research projects over an extended period of time. It was noted that “re-establishing such collaborations is problematic and the outcomes could result in precisely the opposite of what ODA is designed to achieve – leaving no-one behind” (quote from survey responses). The emotional impact on grant holders was also noted by some. Respondents recognised, however, that institutions had worked hard to try to mitigate some of the worst impacts.

Survey and focus group respondents indicated that, by and large, institutional decisions on ODA funds have not affected social sciences disproportionately more than STEM. However, the funding cuts represent a higher proportion of total research funding for the social sciences.

Finally, the balance of research grant funding across disciplines in the social sciences has changed relatively little over the four years up to 2019-20, as shown in Figure 5.2c, with the exception of education and, to some degree, sociology. Geography and environmental studies, and business and management studies, top the group in terms of grant funding levels but have very different academic staff numbers. The 2020-2021 data, when available, will be an interesting ‘pandemic’ comparison.

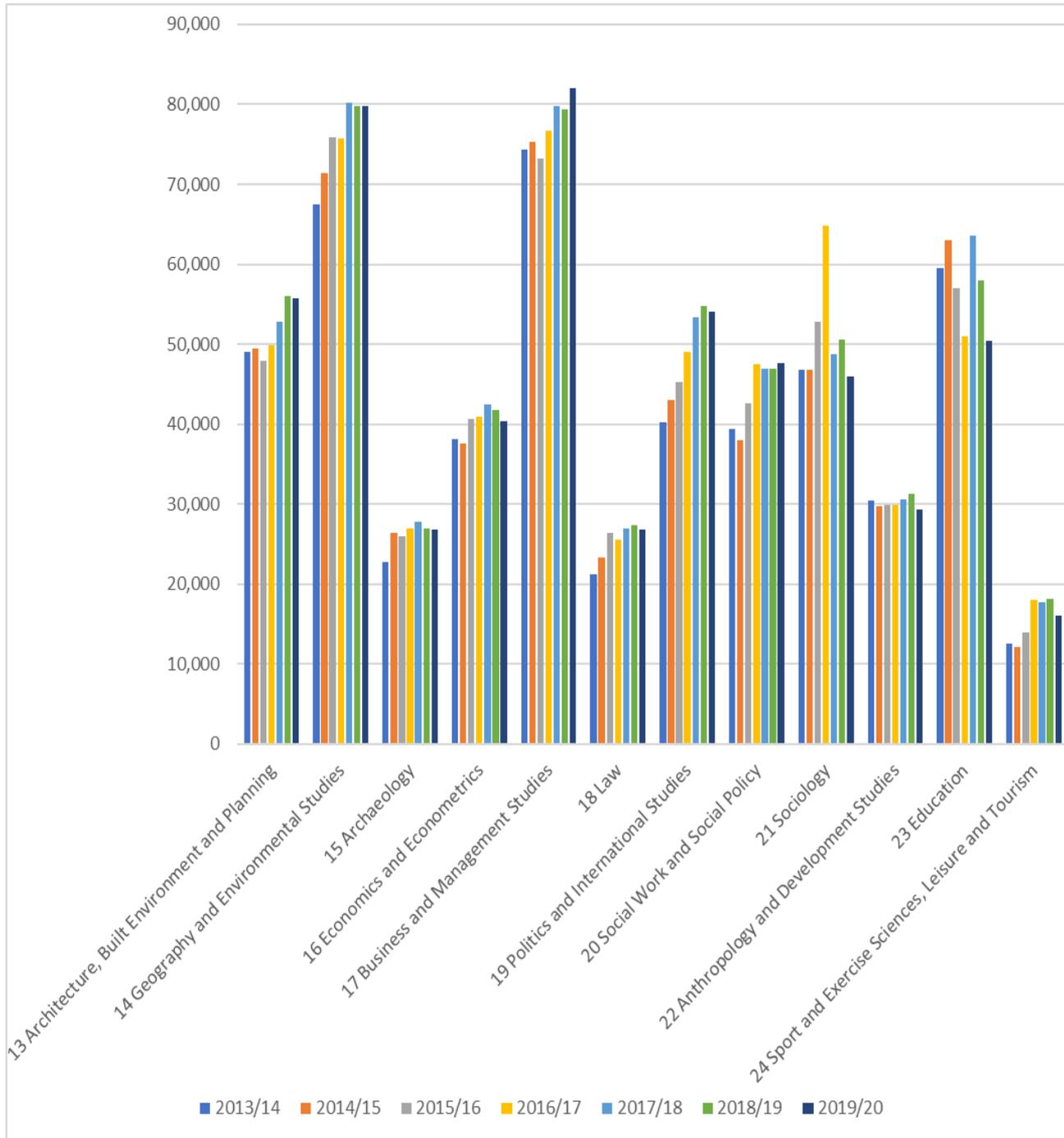


Figure 5.2c_Research grant income (£000) by UoA, 2013-14 to 2019-20 REF Panel C (adjusted to 2020-21 prices).

5.2.4 Research dividends

Both Brexit and the pandemic brought dividends for social science research as well as concerns. This is in addition to the personal benefits for those individuals who had an exceptionally productive lockdown with more time freed up for research.

Frequent references were made in interviews and focus groups to new research funding opportunities arising specifically from Brexit and the pandemic, from UKRI grants and from elsewhere. Some mentioned a 'Brexit boon' of additional/targeted funding made available to examine the impact of Brexit on the UK, with a clear realisation that this played to the strengths of many social science disciplines (e.g. business, economics, geography, law, politics and psychology). In a similar way, others referred to a 'Covid dividend' and the success with which the social science community bid for new funding schemes for Covid-related research, most notably the UKRI open call.

These findings are consistent with the survey from UKRI (2021b) that noted senior researchers were most likely to agree that Covid had provided some unexpected opportunities for their research. In addition, it highlighted respondents from REF Panel C were most likely to report that Covid had provided unexpected opportunities for their research.

Perhaps a more interesting and unexpected set of dividends was raised in several of the focus group discussions and in some of the free text comments in the survey. These concerned research ethos and attitudes to collaboration. They were generally ascribed to the community coming together and collaborating at a time of crisis to manage the pandemic as it affected universities, to the new interactions and approaches this required both within and between institutions, and to responding rapidly to new mission-oriented funding calls.

Respondents pointed to a number of perceived outcomes, including:

- Enhanced engagement with mission-oriented research; and realisation that the research councils and researchers could mobilise at pace.
- Greater appreciation and willingness to participate in multi-disciplinary collaboration both within social sciences and across sectors.
- Enhanced collegiality.
- More inter-institutional collaboration, especially regionally.

- Increased interest in locally-based research (and teaching).

These were seen as positive outcomes on which to build future research agendas in the social sciences. Such comments were not raised universally, but they were by a sufficiently large number of high performing institutions in the social sciences institutions for them to be noted in this report.

5.3 University sector specific findings

In general, the university sector specific findings reflected their differing strengths and emphases on research and teaching, although all the HEIs involved in the study were research active in the social sciences. For example, our survey responses suggest (albeit with a small N) that Russell Group institutions were more affected than other university groups by ODA funding cuts to social science research (Figure 5.3). In all three groups a further 30 to 35% of respondents noted that social sciences research had been affected to a lesser degree (a little) by ODA cuts. There was also some feeling that Russell Group institutions may have been able to provide a greater level of support for their researchers.

The reduction in time given over to research activity during lockdown was also more evident in Russell Group institutions compared with other HEIs. While this could reflect differential contractual allocations of research time across the sector, it might also help account for the apparent reduction in research grant applications in some Russell Group institutions.

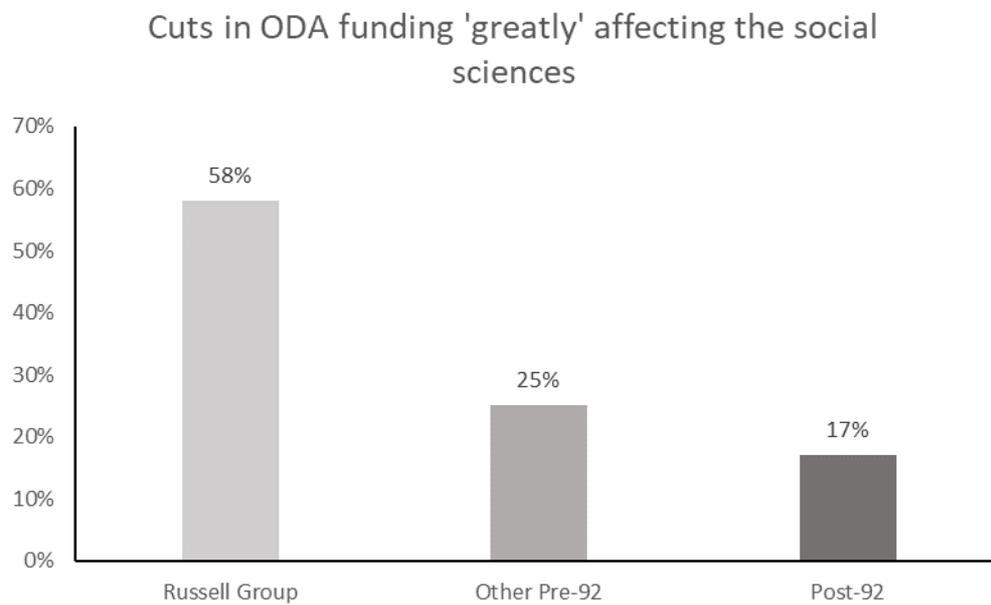


Figure 5.3 University group differences in those perceiving cuts in ODA funding to have 'greatly' affected social sciences in their institution (N=12).

6. Policy, future challenges and strategic matters in the social sciences



Summary

Up to this point, the report has largely focused on the immediate challenges and opportunities presented by the pandemic and Brexit. Changing HE policy has recently been added to the mix, bringing new 'disruptors' into a system already characterised by lagged responses and complex interactions. We observe that:

- Pandemic effects have largely played out unless we have another serious wave, but some strategic decisions remain/have been triggered as a result.
- Brexit impacts are, in many ways, only starting to be seen. Much more is to come in the short and medium terms, not least in terms of access to EU funding, collaborations and staff recruitment/expertise.
- Policy changes, some of the details of which are not yet clear, will play out differentially over future years.
- New external pressures have emerged on the scene to add to the complexity, not least inflation and the Ukraine war; while staff morale continues to be affected to varying degrees by pandemic burn out, the pensions dispute and redundancies.

In short, we see a complex and highly connected system in flux and strategic decisions made in one area will have consequences elsewhere in the system. This speaks to the need for a continuing overview of system pressures and responses in fostering the health of the social sciences. It also underlines the potential benefits of leadership and co-ordination, particularly in the area of research funding and the research pipeline.

In this final section the focus is on looking ahead to future challenges and strategic matters in, and affecting, the social sciences. This draws on the forward-facing responses in the survey and focus groups and independent research and informed commentary. By far the most pressing issue to emerge is that of sustaining funding for research so that the social sciences can continue to thrive and deliver well on their responsibilities to society, the economy, people and the environment.

6.1 Future teaching and working strategies

Reference is made in section 3 to the likely long-term changes in the way digital technologies are used in teaching; and the future use of blended learning as a strategic issue for institutions. The access and technological changes that have

been accelerated by the pandemic are regarded overall as positive and have the capacity to shift teaching and learning more fully into the digital age, where and when appropriate. However, face to face teaching clearly remains important too and is essential in the case of field, community and laboratory-based learning in the social sciences.

It would now be timely for social science to provide substantive evidence to shape the future deployment of digital learning, using the large-scale, natural experiment we have been engaged in for the past two years. For example, there is some evidence emerging in a report from Universities UK (UUK, 2022) that high quality teaching online for large lecture classes can have benefits for at least some institutions and individuals. **Action 12:** We recommend that social science leads on systematic research to gain a deeper understanding of student benefit from, and barriers to, the migration to digital teaching and learning. Identifying which types of students benefit most, in terms of access, outcomes and satisfaction, and why, would be particularly useful in terms of EDI and widening participation. Understanding this in the context of the social sciences also matters, not least, because of the relatively high proportion of social science students (47%) taught in Post-92 institutions which tend to have more diverse student bodies.

We also noted in section 3 the changing attitudes to working from home among university staff and the likely long-term impact on the balance of home and university working. Decisions over future teaching and working strategies, combined with the pressures on income from policy changes and from inflation are likely to accelerate strategic discussions on the use and re-shaping of university estates.

6.2 Future student recruitment strategies

It was abundantly clear from our research that all institutions are carefully considering future recruitment strategies both for international students (UG/PGT) and 'home' undergraduates in the social sciences. In the case of Scotland and NI, the decisions being taken on target numbers of students admitted from England and Wales are important to note.

In the coming year we will see the conjunction of several 'external' changes to the 'home' student recruitment context relevant to UG recruitment decisions:

- The recently announced (DfE, 2022) tuition fee cap and other measures to reduce eligible 'home' students.

- Decisions by the SFC on student number caps in Scotland for Scottish home students.
- A return to more regular A Level (and Scottish Highers) examination processes, albeit with a staged return to normalised grades from pandemic 'grade inflation'.
- The changing 18-year-old demographic, rising especially in England and Wales.

And, internally in institutions:

- The pandemic experiences of teaching larger numbers and the impacts of that on other areas of activity, notably research.

All in the wider context of:

- Relatively high inflation, adding to cost pressures and eroding further the 'real' value of fee income.

The combination in the social sciences of high student demand, relatively high proportions of students in Post-92 institutions, and strong but differentiated international PGT recruitment will add further to the generic factors above in shaping recruitment strategies. The recruitment outcomes will be readily felt by HEIs because, as noted already, the social sciences typically pay a higher % overhead (cross subsidy) to the central institution than other discipline groups.

Focus group discussions indicated that while some institutions are considering keeping future UG entry numbers for the social sciences at close to pandemic 'bulge' levels, others are looking to reduce to pre-pandemic planned levels, for a variety of reasons. Some respondents also intimated that 'institutional limits' were being considered on home students with the expansion of international students to raise income levels. Unsurprisingly, the current need to maintain flexibility in student recruitment was highlighted given the uncertainties of a system in flux. The future decisions over 'home' numbers in the higher tariff institutions will, once again, have re-distributional impacts on numbers and possibly student quality in other institutions.

The survey data on future recruitment plans indicate that the recruitment of international PGT students is the sole area in which the majority of responding institutions aim to recruit above pre-pandemic plan levels (Figure 6.2). Our data suggests this applies to all three university groups.

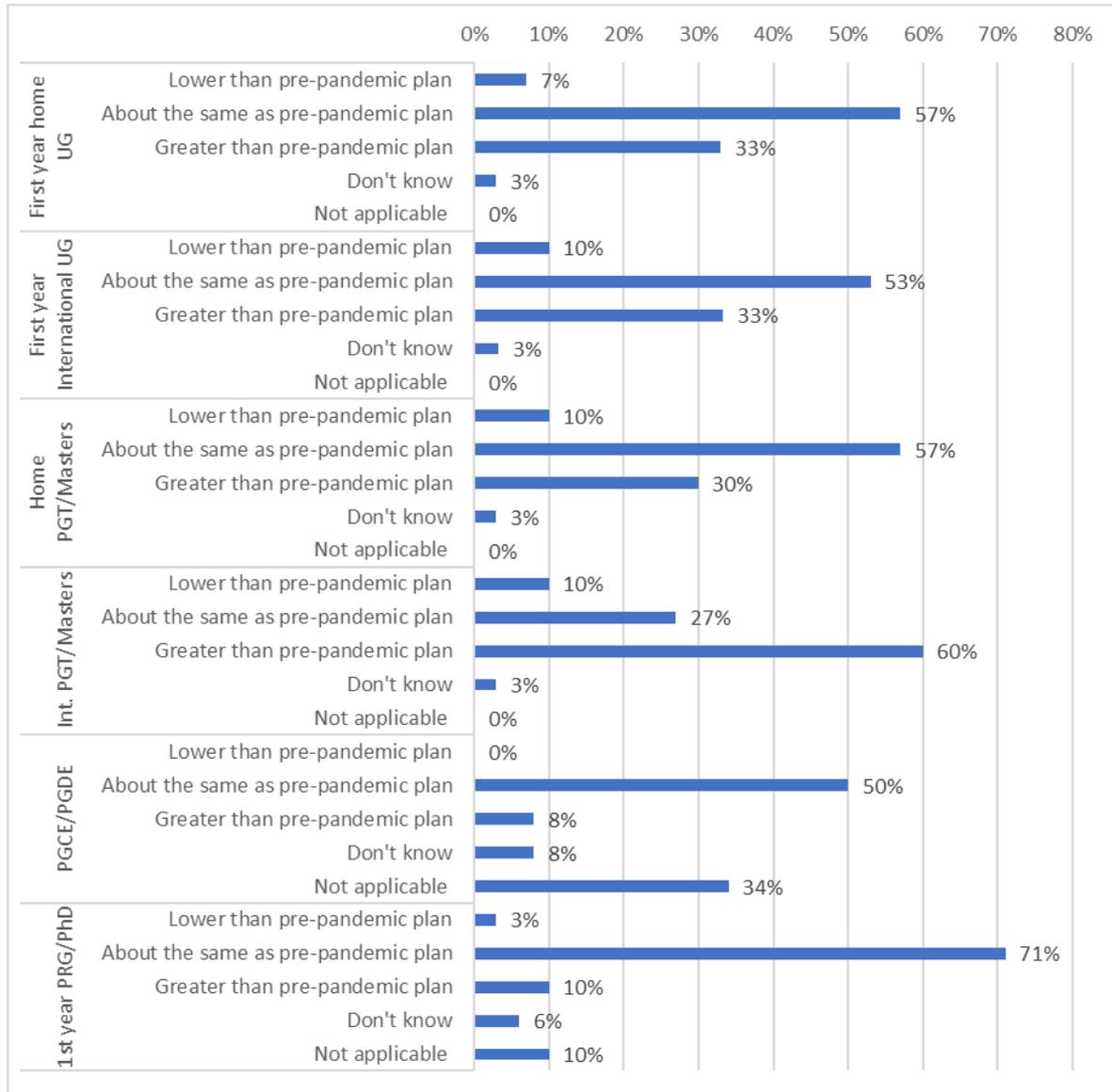


Table 6.2 Survey respondents on how current plans for social science student recruitment in Autumn 2022 differ from pre-pandemic plans (N = 26 to 31 on each question).

There is some indication of social science faculties also exploring new ways of diversifying activities and income generation, including apprenticeships and HE/FE collaborations. This potentially offers additional benefits in smoothing pathways between further and higher qualifications, and the opportunity to develop new qualifications at levels 4 and 5.

With respect to recent HE policies, our survey indicated that the fee cap is a serious concern across all institutions and university sector groups, affecting income at the same time as high inflation. A wide range of institutions also reported that the tuition fee levels no longer cover the costs of teaching students in the social sciences anyway.

Concerns over minimum entry grades and the regulation of employability were more evident in the Post-92 group (Table 4.3, page 36). Details are awaited on the criteria that will trigger regulatory action by the OfS and how 'contextual' factors like local labour markets will be taken into account. We believe the same will be true of the OfS measures on continuation and completion although these developments post-date our last focus group consultations.

The Academy does not perceive the entry grades and employability policy developments to be a major issue for the social sciences sector in HE as a whole. The strong employability outcomes for students in the social sciences is well reported (Lenihan & Witherspoon, 2018), though there are differences by discipline and institution (OfS, 2021). Earnings compare with the best in STEM (Britton, Dearden, Shephard & Vignoles, 2016; Britton, Dearden, van der Erve & Waltmann, 2020) for economics, law and management and business, and the social (including key worker) contributions of others employed in less well-paid sectors are vital (e.g., teaching and social work).

Nevertheless, with current government policies and funding, and wider economic and institutional financial pressures and resilience, we expect to see differentiation in the health and viability for some social science courses and departments in some institutions. Recent notifications of redundancies have been announced, including some in social sciences, at De Montfort, Huddersfield, Roehampton and Wolverhampton universities. **Action 13:** The Post-92 mission group is where risks are probably greatest, hence the impacts on this group should be monitored and evaluated carefully. The OfS employability metrics in particular may cause pressures especially in the less well-off areas of the country and result in reduced opportunities in general in those areas for local young people, for 'levelling up' and for training key workers.

It would be deeply worrying if the new HE policy measures also had negative effects on widening participation and individual social mobility. To understand this, we recommend: **Action 14:** (a) monitoring of EDI impacts over the next five years as the policies start to work through the system; and (b) a careful consideration of

the intersection of 'levelling-up' and the role of universities, especially university social science.

Taken overall across the sector, recruitment in the social sciences is robust and is, from all the evidence we have seen, set to stay so with high student demand, good student outcomes and good employment outcomes. Strategic recruitment adjustments will have a largely internal impact, between institutions. However, at a time of growing demographic pressures and student aspirations, and when alternative level 4 - 5 qualifications are still to be developed to scale, there is little sign currently that a sustainable footing of funding for teaching has been achieved.

6.3 Future composition of the social science student body and pipeline

In section 4.2.3 we considered student recruitment by discipline, and also by origin for international students of the social sciences. For international students, continuing strong recruitment of (and stated over-reliance on) Chinese students, at PGT level, was reported, together with growing numbers from India in particular attributed to diversification strategies aided by visa changes. Declining numbers at UG/PGT were reported from the EU owing to the impact of Brexit.

Evidence from many sources indicated that some pre-existing trends in choice of disciplines appeared to strengthen since 2020. Recruitment in business and management and law in particular grew disproportionately at UG and PGT, and numbers in education and sociology also showed above average increases. The composition of the international student body in the social sciences is undoubtedly evolving.

This raises the question as to whether trends in observed discipline choices are a short-term response to this unusual period or an acceleration of a longer-term movement towards disciplines in the social sciences that may be more readily perceived as 'professional' and 'vocational'. There is, of course, nothing wrong with the latter, but it raises an important strategic issue for the social science community as a whole regarding: the visibility of disciplines; teacher and student knowledge of career opportunities across the social sciences; and the wider awareness of employment evidence (such as, for example, that politics and geography students earn at least as much on average as those from some STEM disciplines (Gapper, 2021)).

The point here is that all social science disciplines contribute greatly to the world of work - economically and/or in societal terms and in the private, public and third

sectors (Lenihan, Witherspoon & Alexander, 2020; Britton et al., 2016) - and help young people to meet their aims and goals. **Action 15:** There is a need and an opportunity to raise awareness further among potential and existing students, at all levels (UG, PGT and PGR), of employability and employment options across the social sciences, and how more granular and informative careers advice could be given. We believe the Academy of Social Sciences, working collaboratively with its member learned societies, could lead a concerted effort in making better evidence and case studies more widely known.

6.4 Future health of social science research

The evidence we have gathered of changes over the past two years (section 4) suggests there are three key aspects to securing the short to medium term future health of research in the social sciences. They are:

1. Rebuilding research careers and culture for those individuals/groups who experienced the greatest disruption.

We have identified highly differentiated and complex effects on research topics, time, future planning, and research career development in the social sciences. Differential distorting impacts are widely reported between individual colleagues, and for three (not mutually exclusive) groups: ECR/PGR; mid-career with significant teaching and other work-related responsibilities; and women colleagues with caring responsibilities, especially young children.

Institutions have clearly and effectively acted to mitigate immediate impacts where they could over the past two years. **Action 16:** Research funders and institutions are encouraged to continue to support and enable the rebuilding of affected research planning and careers over the coming two to three years. Re-adjustment times will vary, and there remained significant concerns about this issue among social science leaders in Spring 2022. This is not inconsistent with the UKRI study (2021b) reporting that almost half of researchers had returned to research time allocations equivalent to pre-pandemic. Addressing any outstanding needs of the Covid cohort of ECR/PGR students was viewed as essential to the pipeline and to individual careers. Similarly, if any ongoing reductions of research and research planning time at some institutions is not addressed then Covid will have a lasting, and differentiated, impact.

2. Strategic opportunities for future research development.

Our discussions identified trends in many institutions, arising from or accelerated by the pandemic, that were seen as offering strategic opportunities for building future research agendas. They included (section 5) strengthening engagement with multi-disciplinary research, mission-oriented research, locally-driven research, networking and collaboration within and across sectors, and greater collegiality. There were also signs that universities were linking more robustly with local organisations, government and policy institutes, to help facilitate further both impact and knowledge exchange. These responses were evident in all three university sector groups. There was no intention that this should be at the cost of blue skies research in the social sciences.

The opportunities for substantive, future Social Science/STEM collaborations were commonly noted (beyond the oft-cited example of social science being called upon to deliver evaluation and communication). The need to promote greater awareness of STEM/Social Science collaborations was also identified by many respondents. (The Academy of Social Science Autumn 2022 policy report is on this topic.) The pandemic itself gave a boost to this, with social science and health sciences working together more systematically. But it holds for other areas too.

In short, this supports a more strategic approach to mission-led research which encourages the best social science research on the key challenges facing the UK and the world today.

3. The future research funding landscape.

This is a serious issue and has the potential to be extremely challenging for the sector. The trends in recent years are evident from section 5.2.3. Increases in research funding in real terms over the ten years since 2013 are modest and the increasing relative importance of EU funding over that time is evident. There are no signs that UK government, charitable and ESRC funding over the next three years will be other than flat at best. In Scotland, we have recently seen announcements of cuts in research support for some institutions (Holden, 2022).

The pending decisions (at the time of writing) are critical to the future shape and extent of research funding for the social sciences in the UK, decisions over:

- Access to EU Horizon funding.
- The extent to which the social sciences are included in any UK replacement programme.

- The manner in which social sciences are included in future mission-led research calls by UKRI and others.

Those decisions will determine whether the social science sector can:

- Continue to thrive and lead in terms of international research standing.
- Sustain the high levels of excellence in social science research and impact evidenced in REF 2021.
- Build and support pressing new research agendas to deliver on its responsibilities for society, economy, people and the environment.

There will potentially be wider implications too for the community in terms of competition for funding; the future of centres of research excellence; sustaining productive existing collaborations and fostering new ones; and increasing further the differentiation of HEIs.

The decisions in coming weeks and months over research funding will be critical in affecting whether or not the UK retains a world leading reputation in social science research and further develops the applications of that research to the challenges facing the UK and the world. **Action 17:** It is vital that social science research is fully recognised and supported in any UK replacement for EU funding and in future UKRI strategic funding and multi-disciplinary cross-Council programmes.

6.5 Confidence of social science leaders

The efforts of, and costs to, many in the social sciences academic and associated communities over the past two years have shone clearly through the evidence we gathered. So, too, has a strong sense of genuine confidence in the social sciences among many of the academic leaders of social science across the wide range of institutions that we have spoken with. However, it is not universally the case, and we empathise with the departments and individuals in the community who face the threat of closure and redundancy.

The confidence has grown, as far as we can tell, from the experience of the social sciences being publicly and institutionally recognised, valued and funded for the roles they so clearly played in research, policy and public understanding throughout the pandemic. It has been furthered too by continuing strong student

demand in the pandemic years and by collegial efforts within and across institutions. REF outcomes overall for social sciences add further reinforcement.

This confidence offers a platform from which the social sciences collectively can better project and deliver their vital contributions to the economy, society, universities and students in terms of research, teaching and employment. Nurturing and growing that external-facing confidence through the new challenges of the coming years, not least in research funding, is a task for everyone and important for everyone.

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Rita Gardner and Tony McEnergy

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9. Appendices



Appendix 1: In-depth interviews methodology

The following is an outline of the objectives, HEI selection criteria, interview schedule, interview protocol and data analysis and reporting for phase one.

Objectives

Within the context of a mixed-methods design, the objectives of the interviews were to generate in-depth understandings – expressed qualitatively as indicative trends and trajectories – of:

1. The challenges and opportunities that emerged for the social sciences within the context of the changes described above. The interviews addressed teaching, student numbers and welfare, staffing, homeworking and lockdown, careers and welfare, research and research income, and innovation/research impact/public engagement.
2. The evolving planning and strategic responses for social science research and teaching that HEI's implemented in response to these opportunities and challenges.

To achieve these objectives, a programme of in-depth group and individual interviews was conducted with senior academic leaders in the social sciences (e.g., Faculty/Department Deans/Heads and Deputies) and Faculty/Department planners from across the sector. The programme included 33 group or individual in-depth interviews, from 89 academics and 16 professionals across 26 UK HEIs (see Table 1).

HE sector	Number of HEIs	Interviews	Academic participants	Professional participants	Total participants
Russell Group	14	16	44	7	51
Other pre-1992	7	10	23	6	29
Post-1992	5	7	22	3	20
Total	26	33	89	16	105

Given the wide variety of UK university structures and nomenclatures within these, it was not possible to accurately classify the seniority of the interviewees.

Nevertheless, the academic cohort was made up of:

- Deans or Deputy Deans or equivalent (some with responsibilities at Deputy VC level).
- Heads of departments and research centres.
- Department members with specific relevant responsibility (e.g., teaching).
- People above Dean levels.

The professional services cohort – although from a range of seniorities and with a range of job titles – were linked by their responsibilities for planning, in particular, student recruitment and student services.

Table 2 below shows the breakdown of the HEIs by country/region.

Country/region	HEIs	HEIs in England
England	18	
<i>East of England</i>		1
<i>East Midlands</i>		1
<i>London</i>		4
<i>North East</i>		2
<i>North West</i>		3
<i>South East</i>		3
<i>South West</i>		2
<i>West Midlands</i>		2
<i>Yorkshire and Humber</i>		
Northern Ireland	1	
Scotland	4	
Wales	3	
Total	26	18

Selection of HEIs

A group of 26 HEIs (and a back-up group of 5) spanning the Russell Group, other pre-1992 and post-1992 universities, was selected for the in-depth interviews. The group was selected to achieve the following three key criteria:

1. Over-representation of Russell Group universities with larger than average social science research incomes, to ensure research-related issues could be adequately explored.
2. Geographical spread across the nations and regions of the UK.
3. A mix of HEIs with varying degrees of focus on and strength in the social sciences. This judgement was based upon the team's knowledge of the UK HE sector.

Interview schedule

The project was introduced to the selected HEIs through a personalised email from the CEO of AcSS, Dr Rita Gardner, to the VC of each institution (see Appendix 1a). The email described the project and invited VCs to nominate a 'key contact' with whom the project could be progressed. In some cases, this process was supported by Professor Nic Beech (VC at Middlesex University and a member of the project advisory board). Once contact had been established with the nominated 'main contact', Dr Kevin Burchell then emailed the 'main contact' at each HEI to begin to schedule the interviews (see Appendix 1b). The email was accompanied by a PDF containing a full project description and interview protocol, for the main contact to share with other potential interviewees in the HEI (see Appendix 1c). Dr Burchell recontacted HEIs that did not respond on a weekly basis, often suggesting interviews and/or sending a list of available dates/times for the interviews. Most HEIs responded after one or two emails but one had not responded after four emails. This HEI was omitted from the interviews.

The scheduling of the interviews contained two main components:

1. Deciding who should participate in the interviews. In some cases, the HEIs did this themselves, while in others this was done in conjunction with suggestions by Dr Burchell.
2. Scheduling the interviews on the basis of lists of available dates/dates provided by Dr Burchell. Given that these were group interviews with busy senior staff, this was a challenging task and the research team is very grateful to all of the academics and personal assistants who supported the project in this way.

Most of the interview scheduling took place between March and April 2021 and was completed by August 2021.

Interview protocol

The interview protocol included the following components, abiding by the high standards of consent, confidentiality and data security (see Appendix 1d):

1. A calendar invitation and Zoom link were circulated to the interview participants.
2. Consent details were emailed to all interview participants with the requirement to respond and confirm understanding and acceptance of the details (see Appendix 1d).
3. All interviews were undertaken online in Zoom by Dr Burchell.
4. The interviews took between 60 and 90 minutes to complete, depending on availability and the number of participants.
5. The interviews were undertaken on the basis of a pre-prepared topic guide (see Appendix 1e).
6. The interviews were recorded in Zoom and on a voice recorder.
7. The interviews were transcribed in Otter.ti
8. The voice files and transcripts were stored and analysed in a secure and password-protected environment, not be shared outside of the project team.
9. The voice files and transcripts will be destroyed six months after the end of the project period (i.e., September 2022).

Data analysis and reporting

All interviews were analysed within the Otter.ti platform, allowing simultaneous reading of transcripts and listening to voice files. The interviews were analysed following procedures associated with thematic analysis (TA), whereby analytic themes were derived from the research objectives and from the data itself. The interviews were analysed using 'traditional' approaches (i.e., not using dedicated qualitative analysis software, such as NVivo). Thus, analysis was undertaken

based on the processes of reading and re-reading (and listening, as appropriate), and thematically categorizing, re-structuring and re-ordering interview materials. As themes, structures and orders emerged and consolidated these were used to begin to structure interview materials for reporting. At this stage close attention was paid to variation within themes, for instance with respect to the social sciences compared to other disciplines, with respect to different parts of the sector or different nations within the UK.

The thematically structured interview materials were then transformed into a reporting structure comprised of descriptive and analytical narratives and illustrative interview quotes, either embedded within the narratives or as separate quotes. The illustrative quotes were often edited to improve brevity and clarity without compromising veracity; several interview quotes were edited to preserve anonymity of either individual or institution. In the reporting, we have attempted to comment on the prevalence of particular views or actions, where this is both possible and appropriate. At the same time, we are alive to the value in qualitative reporting of also highlighting issues and ideas that are not particularly prevalent but might turn out to be significant and the use of particularly vivid language or metaphors.

Appendix 1a: Email from Dr Gardner to HEI VCs

Dear [title and name]

We are writing from the Academy of Social Sciences to introduce this new research project and to invite participation from the [name of HEI]. We have been grant-funded by the ESRC to conduct this research in response to the unprecedented current context and the opportunities and challenges that this presents for UK social sciences*. The ESRC intends to use the aggregate findings from the research to help inform its own planning and strategy, and the findings will also be shared widely with the HE sector and beyond.

The aim of the project is to understand the emerging implications for UK social sciences of Covid-19, Brexit and evolving UK higher education policy. We intend to document short term impacts and to develop insight into the planning and medium-term strategic decisions on the social sciences being taken by UK universities. During 2021, we'll be conducting two phases of in-depth interviews with a sample of HEIs, implementing a questionnaire survey to all HEIs and analysing official HE sector data. The project is led by a team from the Academy of Social Sciences and

Lancaster University and includes Dr Kevin Burchell as the primary research officer.

Given [name of HEI]'s strengths in the social sciences we are very keen for your institution to participate in the in-depth phases of the research, which we have planned for March-April and September-October 2021. To facilitate this, we would be very grateful if you could assist us by forwarding this email to one or two appropriate people in your institution who you feel are best placed to be points of contact for the project (and cc'ing me, r.gardner@acss.org.uk). Most likely, these will be senior leaders and managers responsible for planning and strategy development for the social sciences and more broadly.

If you or your colleagues have any questions about the project or your involvement please do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you and/or your nominated colleagues.

With best wishes

Dr Rita Gardner CBE FAcSS (PI)
Chief Executive
Academy of Social Sciences

Professor Tony McEnery (PI)
Distinguished Professor of English
Academy of Social Sciences
Language and Linguistics
Lancaster University.

* The project definition of the social sciences includes: architecture, building & planning; social, economic & political studies (including social psychology and human geography); law; business & administrative studies; and education.

Appendix 1b: Email from Dr Burchell to 'main contacts'

Dear [name]

As Rita has said, many thanks for taking on the *UK Social Sciences in a Time of Change* coordination role at [name of institution]. Rita has now asked me to take things forward with you in terms establishing the who, how and when of the first in-depth phase of the project with the university.

I am well aware that each institution is different and that everyone is very busy. With this in mind, I am keen to be flexible and guided by you in terms of the best way to do this. That said, if it helps at all, one way of doing things might be to conduct an interview, perhaps with yourself and 1-2 senior colleagues from the

social science Faculties within your School. If you think it is appropriate, you could also perhaps invite someone from your planning team. Perhaps a 90-minute session could be set up later in March and I am obviously keen to fit in with what's possible from your end in terms of dates and times (though I do obviously also have some other commitments).

Our aim in the interviews is to understand changes, trends and trajectories in broad terms, as they relate to the social sciences (relative to other disciplines). For instance, this might be with respect to a broad range of issues encompassing: student numbers, teaching, research, staff numbers and strategies, welfare issues, planning decisions, strategic decisions and so on.

With regards to how we intend to go about the in-depth interviews, please find attached a description of the project (which you may have seen before) and our interview protocol (including confirmation of confidentiality and anonymity throughout). I would be grateful if you could share this with you colleagues as you get them involved in the project, thank you. Once we know who will be involved, I will obtain consent from each of you.

Thank you, [name]. Please do let me know what you think about this outline of a plan. Please do also let me know if you have any questions at this stage. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

With best wishes

Dr Kevin Burchell

Research Fellow: UK social sciences in a time of change

Appendix 1c: Project description/interview protocol

UK social sciences in a time of change

Summary for HEIs, March 2021

Background

UK social science – and the whole of UK higher education (HE) – is going through a period of unprecedented change, challenge and opportunity. The funding landscape has been transformed in recent years, with increasing emphasis on student fees and – in particular – international students, accompanied by reduced

funding from government. In addition, HE policy is under review with ever greater emphasis on teaching excellence and the utility of higher education institutions (HEIs) and research beyond the academy. Finally, two major external shocks – Covid-19 and Brexit – are likely to have significant impacts (particularly given the contemporary reliance on funding from students and international students). There are many indicators that UK social science teaching, research and research impact have thrived over the past fifteen to twenty years – for instance in student numbers, world university rankings, Horizon 2020, REF2014 and several ESRC reviews of UK social science disciplines. In addition, it is well known the social science student income cross-subsidises the STEM disciplines in many HEIs. But what of the future?

Aims

The aim of the UK Social Sciences in a Time of Change project is to provide an early response to this question at the end of 2021. More specifically, the aim is to generate ‘real time’ evidence-based insight and understanding of the emerging impacts of the contemporary situation on the social sciences across the UK HE sector. Further the aim is to understand HEI’s strategic and planning responses to these circumstances, particularly with respect to the social sciences. In broad terms, the research will address issues such as: student numbers and income, student recruitment strategies, organisational restructuring, new constraints on Faculties and departments, staffing levels and strategies (including, staff welfare, gender and Early Career Researcher/PhD student issues), and research income and strategies. Attention will be paid different parts of the sector (e.g. Russell Group/other pre-1992/post-1992 HEIs) and to potentially differing scenarios across the countries of the UK. The project team will produce a research report at the end of 2021 and this will be used as the basis for knowledge exchange activities in the UK and internationally.

Team

The project is a collaboration between the Academy of Social Sciences (PI: Rita Gardner, CEO) and the University of Lancaster (PI: Professor Tony McEnergy) and is funded by an ESRC Grant Award. The Academy is taking the lead in implementation, with the research being carried out by Dr Kevin Burchell and additional support from Sharon Witherspoon (AcSS Head of Policy).

Methods

The research will follow a mixed-methods design and will draw on: two phases of in-depth qualitative interviews with senior managers and social science managers in around 25 UK HEIs, a questionnaire survey across the sector, analysis of secondary data from HESA, ongoing literature review and monitoring, and ongoing dialogue with Learned societies and other stakeholders.

Delivery

The research, analysis and reporting will take place throughout 2021 and the team will report at the end of 2021 (with the possibility of an Addendum after the 2020-2021 HESA data is published in February 2022). January-March 2022 will be used for UK and international knowledge exchange activities.

In-depth interview protocol: data security, confidentiality and anonymity.

The in-depth interviews will be carried out according to high standards for data security, confidentiality and anonymity, as described below. All interview participants will need to give their consent to these approaches prior to the interviews:

- The interviews will be undertaken online (most likely in Zoom) and will be conducted by Dr Kevin Burchell, an experienced qualitative researcher.
- The interviews will take between 60 and 90 minutes to complete, though this may vary depending on how many people are participating in the interview and the preferences of the interviewees.
- The interview will take the form of a conversation or discussion, based around a set of topics (based on the project Aims, as described above).
- You may withdraw from the interview process at any stage and request that your data is destroyed.
- The interviews will be audio recorded in Zoom and transcribed in Otter.ti (or similar).
- The voice files and transcripts will be stored and analysed by the research team in a secure and password-protected environment and will not be shared outside of the project team.

- The voice files and transcripts will be destroyed six months after the end of the project period, i.e., in September 2022.
- The outcomes of the analysis will be reported in a project report and possibly in academic papers. The project report will be shared with all of the research participants and will be published on the Academy of Social Sciences website.
- Some direct quotes will be used in the reporting. These will be anonymous; it will NOT be possible to associate any interview quote with an individual interviewee or institution.

Questions and concerns

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Dr Kevin Burchell, k.burchell@acss.org.uk.

If you have any concerns about how this research is carried out, please contact Dr Rita Gardner (Project PI, CEO of Academy of Social Sciences), r.gardner@acss.org.uk.

Appendix 1d: Consent information

Dear [name]

I would be very grateful if you could read and respond to this email. In your response, please could you confirm that you understand and consent to the information in the email. Thank you.

Please note the following details with respect to the interviews, data security and confidentiality:

1. The interviews will be undertaken online (most likely in Zoom) and will be conducted by Dr Kevin Burchell, an experienced qualitative researcher.
2. The interviews will take around 90 minutes to complete, though this may vary depending on how many people are participating in the interview.
3. The interview will take the form of a conversation or discussion, based around a set of topics.

4. You may withdraw from the interview process at any stage and request that your data is destroyed.
5. The interviews will be audio recorded in Zoom and a voice recorder.
6. The interviews will be transcribed in Otter.ti.
7. The voice files and transcripts will be stored and analysed by the research team in a secure and password-protected environment and will not be shared outside of the project team.
8. The voice files and transcripts and will be destroyed six months after the end of the project period, i.e., in September 2022.
9. The outcomes of the analysis will be reported in a project report and possibly in academic papers. The project report will be shared with all of the research participants and will be published on the Academy of Social Sciences website.
10. Some direct quotes will be used in the reporting. These will be anonymous; it will NOT be possible to associate any interview quote with an individual interviewee or institution.

If you have any queries about the interviews or anything in this email, please Reply to this email.

If you have any concerns about the interviews or the ways in which they have been conducted, please contact the project PI: Rita Gardner at r.gardner@acss.org.uk.

As mentioned above, I would be very grateful if you could read and respond to this email. In your response, please could you confirm that you understand and consent to the information in the email. Thank you.

With best wishes

Dr Kevin Burchell

Research Fellow: UK social sciences in a time of change.

Appendix 1e: Interview topic guide

1. Introductions, thanks, confirmation of agreement to record/consent info. Start recording.
2. In broad terms, what have been the impacts (positive and negative) of recent changes in UK HE policy, Brexit and Covid on social sciences in your organisation and your organisation in general?
3. Followed by more specific prompts/probes, as appropriate.
 - a. Student numbers, with breakdown, as appropriate (e.g., level, origins, subjects)
 - b. Staff welfare
 - c. Staff work planning models
 - d. ECRs/PhDs
 - e. Staff numbers, with breakdown, as appropriate (e.g., contract types)
 - f. Research income, amounts, sources
 - g. Innovation/impact/engagement?
 - h. Other relevant themes?
4. In broad terms, with reference to the social sciences, what shorter term planning decisions have been taken in responses to these impacts (positive and negative).
5. Prompt: do these decisions affect all disciplines equally, affect different sectors differently, and/or are specific to the social sciences).
6. In broad terms, with reference to the social sciences, what – if any - longer term strategic decisions are being considered or taken in response to these impacts.
7. Followed by more specific prompts/probes, as appropriate.
 - a. Internal reorganisation (mergers, overseas campuses etc.)
 - b. Growing some areas (centres of excellence), shrinking others
 - c. Changes in curriculum/teaching focus/ethos/delivery
 - d. Student numbers, with breakdown, as appropriate (e.g. level, origins, subjects)
 - e. Staff welfare
 - f. Staff work planning models
 - g. ECRs/PhDs
 - h. Research income, sources
 - i. Innovation/impact/engagement?
 - j. Other relevant themes?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to add?
9. Discussion of second phase of engagement. Invitation to keep in touch with major developments.
10. Thanks and close.

Appendix 2: Quantitative survey methodology

The aims, survey construction, distribution, data cleaning and processing steps are outlined below.

Aims

The quantitative survey had two key aims. First it provided an opportunity to obtain a range of in-depth semi-quantitative data from HEIs that would complement the qualitative interviews, follow-up online discussions and HESA data. Second, the survey was sent out to a wider audience allowing the opportunity for greater engagement from HEIs.

Survey construction

An initial pilot survey was created to test and assess the nature of the questions created.

This initial pilot survey was sent to the current members of the SSTC team (Dr Rita Gardner, Prof. Tony Mcenery, Sharon Witherspoon) along with four external individuals in positions of social science responsibility in institutions and who had participated in the in-depth interviews.

Feedback on the pilot survey led to revisions and amendments resulting in the main survey consisting of the following nine sections, each of which related solely to social sciences in respondents' institutions. The format was multiple choice with opportunity for free text commentary at the end of each relevant section:

1. Background information.
 - a. Welcome message and outline of the SSTC project.
 - b. Defining the social sciences.
 - c. Outline of who should complete the survey.
 - d. Indication of when the survey will close.
2. Demographics.
 - a. Section of HE.
 - b. Region/country.
 - c. Social science disciplines.
 - d. University sector (Russell Group; other Pre-92, Post-92).

3. Students.
 - a. Student entry for 2021 for social science disciplines.
 - b. Trends for individual social science disciplines:
 - i. Subjects where student intake was higher.
 - ii. Subjects where student intake was lower.
 - c. Plan for social science student recruitment autumn 2022 and how it differs from pre 2020 plan for that period.
 - d. Anything else to add?
4. Research.
 - a. How has social science research fared since the beginning of 2020, on a number of dimensions?
 - b. Research funding, funding changes and their impacts in the social sciences?
 - c. Anything else to add?
5. Staffing.
 - a. Staff management and support measures implemented since Covid-19?
 - b. Have the social sciences been the focus of these compared to STEM?
 - c. Which groups of social science staff?
 - d. Question on staff/student ratios:
 - i. Which social science disciplines have been particularly affected?
 - e. Plans for recruiting social science staff.
 - f. Challenges in recruitment/retention of social sciences staff?
 - g. Anything else to add?
6. Finances.
 - a. Planning assumptions of financial position and predicted position in social sciences?
 - b. Which social sciences disciplines are in a strong financial position?
 - c. Which social sciences disciplines are in a weak financial position?
 - d. Any curtailment/merger/discontinuation/closure of social sciences courses?
7. Policy change implications.
 - a. Levels of concern with respect to a number of potential policy changes?
8. Future planning and strategic issues.
 - a. What level of attention is your institution giving to a range of identified issues?
9. Final comments.
 - a. Three most important issues regarding the health of the social sciences.
 - b. Anything else to add?

Survey distribution

An initial email from the Academy was sent out in late December 2021 to 117 identified HEIs which included a hyperlink to the main survey (see Appendix 2a). Of the 117 identified institutions 22 (18.8%) were from Russell Group; 31 (26.5%) from other Pre-92 institutions; and 64 (54.7%) from Post-92 institutions. Furthermore, of the 117 institutions, 93 (79.5%) were in England, 16 (13.7%) in Scotland, 6 (5.1%) in Wales and 2 (1.7%) in Northern Ireland. To facilitate the response rate two additional email reminders were sent out by Dr David Vernon to all institutions in January 2022 and the survey remained open until 30th May 2022. All responses were submitted directly online using Qualtrix software, and anonymously.

Data cleaning and processing

Once the survey was closed it was noted that 98 responses had been received. All responses were then cleaned by removing any empty submissions (N=40), or submissions with <6 entries (N=11). This left 47 remaining data points (40% response rate). Given the relatively low N and the unequal sample sizes across the HE sector (20 Russell Group, 14 Other Pre-92, 12 Post-92, with 1 failing to identify) inferential statistics were inadvisable and hence descriptive statistics were used to explore trends in the data.

Appendix 2a: Email from project Co-PIs to HEIs with survey link

Dear

Welcome to the UK 'social sciences in a time of change' survey.

We are writing from the Academy of Social Sciences and Lancaster University to invite you to participate in this survey on behalf of your institution.

We have been grant-funded by the ESRC to conduct this research in response to the unprecedented current context – Brexit, Covid and HE policy changes – and the opportunities and challenges this is presenting for UK social sciences. The ESRC intends to use the aggregate findings from the research to help inform its own planning and strategy, and the findings will be shared widely with the HE sector, with UKRI, and with relevant government departments. They will also support the Academy's and learned societies' advocacy and policy work.

Our objective is to cover the social sciences across the entire UK higher education sector and we would really appreciate your support please in achieving this.

We are asking in this survey about recent experiences, plans, opportunities and concerns of the social sciences in your institution. This survey is being complemented by in-depth interviews, analysis of HESA data and a literature context. The project report will be published in Spring 2022 and will be followed by knowledge exchange activities.

Responses to the survey will be anonymous and individual institutions will not be identifiable in any element of the data or reporting. The data will be stored, managed and analysed in secure and password-protected environments.

The link to the Qualtrics survey is here:

https://lancasteruni.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_b2u4GEKUX92CUjc

The survey will be live until (date noted at time). It has seven sections:

A. Background information; B. Students; C. Research; D. Staff; E. Finances; F. Policy change implications; G. Planning and strategic issues.

Who should complete the survey?

We would like to receive ONE completed survey from each UK higher education institution. With this in mind, we have sent the survey email and link to you, the person who we think will be in the best position to respond given your responsibilities.

We appreciate that you may not have responsibility for all of the social science disciplines that are taught and researched in your institution. With this in mind, please feel free - only to the extent to which this is possible - to work collaboratively on the survey with relevant colleagues in other faculties or schools. To facilitate this, we have set up the survey so that you can easily move back and forth within it. In addition, you can return to the survey using the same link, edit previous responses and add more responses right up to the survey deadline. Just make sure you return to the survey in the same browser and on the same device.

We also appreciate that you may not be able to answer all the questions; if this is the case there is a 'don't know' box provided on the multiple choice questions.

If you have any questions about the survey please contact Dr David Vernon on d.vernon@acss.org.uk

We do hope you are willing to contribute to this study and we thank you for doing so.

With best wishes

Dr Rita Gardner CBE FAcSS
CEO, Academy of Social Sciences

Prof Tony McEnergy
University of Lancaster

Appendix 3: Follow-up online focus groups methodology

The aim, contact schedule, ground rules, discussion topic areas and completion rates are outlined below.

Aim

The follow-up online focus groups aimed to arrange discussions with all those HEIs that had been involved in the initial in-depth qualitative interviews. The aim was to explore which changes arising from Brexit and Covid were having sustained impacts 'now' (two years on, and one year on from the in-depth interviews which captured the immediate response), which changes had already been managed, and what substantive new opportunities and challenges were arising for the social sciences. The latter included exploring their views on current HE policy changes.

Contact schedule

Email invitations were initially sent out on 24th January 2022 to all 26 institutions that took part in the earlier in-depth interviews (see Appendix 3a). Email reminders and additional prompts were sent out on three occasions: 1st and 22nd February 2022, and 7th March 2022.

Ground rules

The following ground rules were applied to the online discussions:

1. The discussions will be conducted online (i.e., Teams) with a group of between 2 – 8 participants and led by Dr David Vernon with involvement from other members of the project team.
2. The discussions will adopt a 'Chatham House Rule' approach (i.e., all participants are free to use information obtained in the session, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, should be revealed).
3. The session will take approximately 90 minutes, though this may vary depending on how many people are participating and the range of topics covered.
4. The session will take the form of a conversation or discussion, based around a set of topics (see topic discussion guide).

5. You may withdraw from the session at any point.
6. The session will be recorded.
7. Any files and transcripts from the session will be stored and analysed by the research team in a secure and password-protected environment and will not be shared outside of the project team.
8. The files and transcripts and will be destroyed six months after the end of the project period.
9. The outcomes of the analysis will be reported in a project report and possibly in academic papers. The project report will be shared with all of the research participants, other parties for whom it is relevant, and will be published on the Academy of Social Sciences website.
10. Some direct quotes may be used in the reporting. These will be anonymous; it will NOT be possible to associate any discussion quote with an individual interviewee or institution.

If you have any queries about the discussion or anything in this email, please reply directly to this email. If you have any concerns about the discussion and/or the way in which it was conducted, then please contact the project Co-PI: Dr Rita Gardner at r.gardner@acss.org.uk.

Discussion topics notified to participants

Think about how the changes in UK HE policy, Brexit and Covid are having sustained impacts **now** - or potentially important future impacts - both positively and negatively, on each of the following aspects in the social sciences in your institution.

- Student recruitment/numbers
- Staffing, careers, welfare, teaching models
- Research, inc. ECRs
- Finances

- Subject-related issues (e.g., various disciplines and sub-disciplines of the social sciences⁴, STEM vs Non-STEM)
- Strategic planning across the university

And

- The opportunities and concerns you see to the health of the social sciences over the next two years.
- Any other matters relating to the social sciences you wish to raise/discuss.

Guiding questions used by interviewer

In terms of guiding the discussion the plan will be to use the three key focal areas (changes in policy, Brexit, Covid) to inform questions about each of the following areas in turn: student recruitment/numbers, staff and staffing, research, finance, discipline and strategic issues, as you now experience them and in relation to the social sciences.

Students

1. What has changed since we last spoke/what is new in terms of students in social science subjects?

Prompts on recruitment levels, quality, welfare, differences between 2021 and anticipated 2022 UG intake, international and PGT students, and PGR uptake; if required.

Staffing

2. What has changed/what is new in terms of staffing in the social sciences?

Prompts on: staff levels and appointments, contract types, restructuring, workload models, continuing impact of Covid on vulnerable groups previously identified; staff retention and recruitment; if required.

⁴ The definition of the Social Sciences includes: architecture, building & planning; social, economic & political studies (including social psychology and human geography); law; business & administrative studies; and education

Research

1. What has changed/what is new in terms of research in the social sciences?

Prompts on: research activity, ongoing pandemic impacts on specific groups, UK funding changes and opportunities, mitigation strategies for funding losses, access to EU funding; if required.

Financial matters

2. What has changed/what is new in terms of finances with regards to social sciences?

Prompts on: financial standing of social sciences, planning for contingent financial issues, financial position of disciplines within the social sciences; if required.

Discipline matters

1. Do these three drivers (Covid, Brexit etc) or the decisions that have been made in response to them affect all disciplines equally, affect different sectors differently, and/or are specific to the social sciences?

Prompts on: comparisons with other sectors (eg STEM), differential uptake of different disciplines in the social sciences; if required.

Strategic matters

1. In broad terms, with reference to the social sciences, what – if any – longer term strategic decisions are being considered or taken in response to these issues?

The remaining challenges/concerns/opportunities

1. What are the issues that remain prominent and unresolved with regard to the impacts (positive and negative) of these three drivers on social sciences?
2. Have any new opportunities/challenges emerged for the social sciences in the past few months or is there anything else that you would like to add?
3. What are the likely lasting impacts (positive/negative) of these recent three drivers of change for the social sciences in your view?

Focus group responses

Each discussion had representatives from a minimum of two institutions and maximum of four. Eight discussion groups were held to accommodate demanding diaries. The discussions were free flowing, remained broadly within the guidelines, were well focused on the social sciences, and rarely needed detailed prompting although follow-up questions were asked where relevant.

Completion rates

Six of the original 26 institutions either failed to respond or initially responded and then later had to cancel owing to workloads. Representatives from all remaining institutions (N=20; 77%) took part in the online focus group discussions which began on 14th February 2022 and ended on 4th April 2022. Of the 20 that participated 11 (55%) were from the Russell Group, 5 (25%) were from Other Pre-92 institutions and 4 (20%) were from Post-92 institutions.

Appendix 3a: Follow-up online focus groups email to specified contacts

To:

From: David Vernon

Cc Rita, Tony

Subject: UK social sciences in a time of change – Follow-up discussion

Dear _____,

We are writing to you again from the Academy of Social Sciences regarding our ongoing project, *UK Social Sciences in a Time of Change*. As mentioned before this is an ESRC funded project examining the emerging implications for UK Social Sciences⁵ and HEIs in general of the developments resulting from changes to UK higher education policy, Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. The project is led by Dr Rita Gardner from the Academy of Social Sciences and Professor Tony McEneaney from Lancaster University and includes Dr David Vernon as the primary research officer.

⁵ The project definition of the Social Sciences includes: architecture, building & planning; social, economic & political studies (including social psychology and human geography); law; business & administrative studies; and education

During 2021, we conducted a series of in-depth interviews with a sample of HEIs, which you kindly took part in, and we thank you for your time and support. We are now getting back in touch with you to conduct some follow-up online group discussions to understand which of the key issues you raised in the original interviews have been resolved and what has changed as a result, which issues remain prominent and unresolved, and what new opportunities and challenges for the social sciences have emerged since those interviews. The ground rules for the discussion and some topic guides are attached for your information.

We are aware that this is a busy time of year and really appreciate your time and support in helping us to understand how these issues may impact on the social sciences and HEIs. Hence, we are keen to be as flexible as possible and can be guided by you in terms of the best way to do this. That said, it would be helpful if we could agree a date/time from the following alternatives during January/February 2022 as we are keen to fit in with what is possible for you.

(A table of alternatives was given)

If you have any questions about the project or would like to talk on the telephone, please do not hesitate to contact me. We look forward to hearing from you as to how you would like to proceed.

With best wishes

Dr Rita Gardner CBE FAcSS (PI)
CEO, Academy of Social Sciences

Prof Tony McEnery (PI)
University of Lancaster