

ACADEMY of SOCIAL SCIENCES

Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023

Charitable purpose

The promotion of social sciences in the UK for public benefit.

Our vision

The social sciences flourish in the UK and sustain their world leading stature. They are widely valued for their contributions to society, economy, environment and well-being; and led by confident and capable communities of academics and other professionals, learned societies and students.

Our mission

To enhance and safeguard the social sciences in research, professional practice, and education; and to champion and foster the understanding and application of social sciences in policy, business and public life.

Context

The social sciences underpin all our lives and our futures. They are the science of us – of understanding people, communities, society and economy. From how we interact locally and globally, to the politics of how we organise and govern ourselves; from understanding the drivers of regional economic growth and modelling economic futures, to succeeding in a globalised world; from appreciating ethics and inclusivity to recognising and dealing with prejudice and inequality; from how we behave to how we adapt to change and new technology; from how we use the environment to how and why, as society, we abuse it and how we can do better; to the way we perceive and manage pandemics and other global disasters; and much more.

Communities, society and economy suffer major unexpected shocks, such as Covid-19, and change and evolve continually owing to other processes and advances in technology. The need to understand this dynamism - the driving forces and their impacts and interdependencies - and for governments, business, and research funders to have that evidence to hand, are vital to securing prosperity, a sound economy and inclusive society, now and in future.

We face an unprecedented mix of social and economic challenges right now, as individuals and as society, in our communities, in the UK and the devolved nations, and in the world as a whole. At home, we have four significant, co-incident and interlinked challenges: economic and social recovery from Covid-19; Brexit and its implications for our economy, employment and regional futures; climate change, the impacts of which are increasingly being felt; and inclusion and well-being. There are many others too; and all of them will offer opportunities as well as challenges. Social science brings vital understanding, challenge, and some of the answers, in its research and wider professional communities. It is more important than ever that the social sciences are in a position to play their role to the best of their ability. This is what drives our strategy over the coming three years.

Strong applied, and inclusive, social science is essential if we are to manage well the challenges that face us regionally, nationally and internationally. All of the social sciences matter as the major challenges demand multidisciplinary approaches underpinned by appropriate research methodologies, analytical techniques and data infrastructures. They also demand understanding of different perspectives, and diversity in the social sciences remains a key priority. Furthermore, many issues cannot be informed and addressed by science alone, or by social science alone, but require good collaboration between the two.

The higher education sector faces similar contexts, but with impacts that will be felt, for example, in student numbers, research funding, early career scholar futures, and skills needs for the future. Sustaining investment, training and the pipeline in the social sciences matters.

There has never been a more important time for the social sciences, a sector so vital to us all in its applications, studied and enjoyed by hundreds of thousands of students in the UK each year, and one that offers much in terms of employability and the workforce across the private, public and third sectors. All the more so as **the UK**

is world leading in terms of the social sciences. It is vital therefore that the term 'social science' and the scope of the sector is well understood outside academia. The social sciences today include applied, empirical, modelling and theoretical studies, across a wide range of disciplines¹ together with the methodologies, analytical tools and data infrastructures that underpin them. They need and deserve a higher profile.

¹ The social sciences include the following disciplines and study areas: anthropology; business and management; economics; education; finance and accounting; human geography; law; marketing; planning; politics and international studies; regional studies; social policy and social work; social psychology; social statistics; sociology; tourism and leisure studies.

Strategic Objectives

The Academy of Social Sciences' new strategy has **six objectives that set the medium-term framework for our work**, in delivering our charitable purpose. They build on our work to date and extend it into perceived priority areas.

An action plan defines our short-term goals and priority activities within each of these six objectives; the initial plan has been formulated for the period 2020-2023.

The strategic objectives place us centre stage, through our Campaign for Social Science, in publicly championing the social sciences and raising their profile as a sector.

They build on our well-established policy work, broadening that to secure through advocacy, as best we can, the health of the sector for the benefit of everyone. Developing our advocacy role, both in private and in public, complements the awareness-raising of the Campaign and will increasingly draw on the Academy's rich networks within and beyond the Fellowship.

A key part of securing the future of the social sciences, providing opportunity for young people from the widest possible range of backgrounds and ensuring UK plc has the breadth of talent it needs, lies in supporting and encouraging diversity in the pipeline of students into social science. This is identified for the first time as a distinct objective.

A new focus, on fostering the application of the social sciences and innovation through them, recognises the importance of multi- and inter-disciplinary social science and meaningful dialogue at the interfaces of academia, professional practice and policy. It also speaks to the Academy's convening power and the opportunities that has for defining research agendas in key areas.

The Academy exists for the benefit of the social sciences in the UK as a whole. Our Fellows remain vital to our mission, as sources of expertise, as exemplars of excellence and as social science ambassadors. We will be supported in our work by Fellows, elected for their excellence and leadership in both academic scholarship and in the development and application of social sciences in the public, private and third sectors.

We will work collaboratively with learned society members, sister bodies and other partners, where we have shared objectives, leveraging greater impact and a stronger voice through collaboration. We will continue to offer support to our learned society community too through knowledge exchange activities and advocacy.

We will ensure that the Academy is well-run, efficient and uses its limited resources wisely. Above all, we will ensure a sustainable financial future for the Academy, so that the social sciences and the public can continue to benefit from our work.

The six objectives are:

4.1 To champion the social sciences: promoting the vital role of social science in improving decision-making, society and lives

The Academy as a leading UK champion, through its Campaign for Social Science, demonstrating convincingly the contribution of social science research and practice to addressing key challenges and opportunities facing the UK. The task is to shape and deliver a public-facing narrative of the social sciences, so that what they are and what they contribute to society are better understood, valued and used.

4.2 To sustain the health of the social sciences in research and education: enabling a thriving and confident community

The Academy as a leading UK advocate and lobby for the social sciences, influencing governments and other decision-makers on matters relevant to their health, such as policy, funding and infrastructure; and co-ordinating wider support and action, working with our learned society members.

4.3 To recognise excellence in social science: with an expert and engaged Fellowship

The Academy as the primary UK body conferring Fellowships across the breadth of the social sciences that recognise excellence in both scholarship and the application of social science in academia and other professional sectors.

4.4 To widen participation and skills in the social sciences: recognising the importance of social mobility, diversity and employability to people and society

The Academy working with learned societies and other partners to facilitate a strong and diverse future pipeline of students; with skills fit for the future, and better understanding of the opportunities provided by the study of social sciences.

4.5 To foster innovation and application of the social sciences: informing and helping to address challenges of our time

The Academy as a facilitator and convenor, enabling cross disciplinary, cross institutional and cross sector networks of professional interest on important thematic challenges facing the UK; identifying research agendas; and a gateway to contacts in the social sciences.

4.6 To ensure a sustainable future for the Academy of Social Sciences: as the only body that exists solely to represent social sciences in the UK.

Ensuring the Academy's future as an independent, effective and respected champion of social science in the UK, with sufficient and sustainable funding, and strong community support, as befits an organisation formed by the social sciences community.

Priority Actions: 2020-2023

1 Champion the social sciences – awareness raising

- Showcase and engage priority audiences with social sciences contributions to pressing societal challenges; starting in 2020 with the Coronavirus pandemic.
- Research, publish and disseminate a series of reports on social science: in private business; in the public sector; and in partnership with STEM; starting in 2020 with private business.
- Develop the Campaign's web presence, social media and reach; supported by think pieces, events and video content.
- Develop a social sciences web resource hub, as a first point of reference to what social science is and why it matters.
- Engage our community of Fellows and supporters in England and the devolved nations in actions to raise awareness of the social sciences and their contributions.
- Be a founding partner in the SHAPE initiative on public engagement; providing input to that through some of the above actions.

2. Sustain the health of the social sciences – policy, advocacy and lobbying

- Monitor the health of the social sciences in the UK, commencing with the period of anticipated intense pressure in 2020 and 2021; to enhance awareness (knowledge exchange) and as an evidence base for advocacy.
- Sustain a strong policy function, prioritising key policy issues in higher education, skills, social science infrastructure and funding; using position and briefing papers to good effect.
- Build on our strengths to become a more effective advocate and lobbyist, influencing policy; working in partnership with sister bodies regionally, nationally and internationally to amplify messages and impact.
- Champion the role and importance of learned societies in the research ecosystem; working collectively with learned society members.

3. Recognise excellence in social science – an expert and engaged Fellowship

- Maintain a strong body of Fellows; with appropriate representation of diversity and gender, disciplines, universities, regions, employment sectors, and ratios of retired to salaried Fellows.
- Continue to grow the proportion of professionals from non-academic sectors in the Fellowship.
- Continue to grow the standing of the Academy's journal and access to it.
- Promote greater engagement of Fellows through actions in this strategy.
- Evaluate options for engaging ECRs and 'rising stars' in the Academy and encouraging diversity in these groups.

4. Widen participation and skills - securing a well-trained pipeline

- Develop the Academy social science web resource to aid widening participation.
- Showcase employability and careers opportunities in the social sciences.
- Promote the skills agenda in the social sciences, with a focus on skills needs for the future.

5. Foster innovation and application - connecting communities

- Develop our role as a gateway for dissemination and in making connections between policy, practice and academic communities.
- Pilot the establishment of limited life, cross sectoral and cross disciplinary networks on key challenges, facilitating dialogue between the public sector, academic and wider professional sectors, and informing research agendas.

6. Ensure a sustainable future – being there, being active

- Demonstrate success in delivering the new strategy, in attracting funding and support, and in growing the Academy's profile, reach and impact.
- Secure strategy set up funding; fundraise to support development projects in this strategy; and extend the Campaign sponsorship base.
- Disseminate our work more widely: grow our communications outreach, develop a single, new integrated, outward-facing website and modern visual identity, and enhance our contact database.
- As an organisation, be outcome and impact oriented, with clear goals and measures of success.

Fellows and Learned Society members

The Academy was established in 1983 by a number of leading learned societies in the social sciences to act as an umbrella body and advocate for the sector. It exists primarily to serve the UK social science sector and community as a whole.

The Academy's c. 1400 Fellows, nominated and selected by peers, are leaders in their fields and all have made substantive contributions to the social sciences both within and beyond their day jobs. Fellows support the Academy and our work with their knowledge and expertise, contact networks, and through their subscriptions which provide core funding for the Academy.

The Academy has 46 member learned societies, each of which are independent organisations in their own right, supporting their specific disciplines and

communities. They represent all of the main disciplines in the social sciences, many of the sub-disciplinary areas and many of the professions.

Together, the Academy and its learned society members constitute some 90,000 individuals; a powerful reservoir of knowledge and expertise and a potentially powerful collective voice for social science. The Academy and learned societies work together symbiotically.

The strategy sees more Fellows being drawn into more active roles, over and above existing roles in nominations, committees and the journal:

- As active champions of the social sciences
- In amplifying the Academy's work and increasing its reach
- In contributing to comment pieces, our journal, and other activities
- In contributing to cross sector networks
- In organising regional chapters
- As liaison points with the Academy

The new strategy values partnerships, and in particular partnerships with Campaign supporters, learned society members, and sister bodies, all working together to amplify the message and voice of the social sciences.

The new strategy emphasises inclusivity and equality, and the Academy will promote that in the nomination of Fellows as well as in all other aspects of our work.

Approved by the Academy's Council, October 2020