

Academy and Campaign Statement on the 2017 General Election

10 June 2017

The outcome of the 2017 General Election is now in, and the challenges facing the UK are clear. The Academy of Social Sciences and its Campaign for Social Science believe that the social sciences will be needed now more than ever to address these.

Social science expertise will be essential as Britain negotiates its exit from the European Union and determines its future strategy for growth and development. For example, a successful strategy for growth and development rests not only on economic expertise but also in understanding law and planning, incentives for long-term as opposed to short-term growth, and what works in effecting a step-change in UK education and skills. Higher levels of investment in science and technology alone will not lead to growth if policies for regional development, planning, investment and skills do not promote implementation and enterprise.

Similarly, economists, political scientists, diplomatic historians, and trade and negotiation specialists have a crucial role to play in informing negotiations relating to Brexit and the complex trade-offs that will be involved. Labour market specialists and economists will be needed to understand the employment needs and alternatives in a range of sectors, including agriculture, IT, finance, and health care.

Social science will also be vital in addressing wider global challenges. Using our understanding to influence human behaviour is essential if issues such as antibiotic resistance, climate change, and societal ageing are to be addressed.¹

Yet the social sciences can only play a constructive role if their voice is heard and their work supported. The Academy and the Campaign call again for engagement with us in the development of the industrial strategy and planning for regional development and skills. We believe the High Level Stakeholder Working Group on EU Exit, Universities, Research and Innovation would be strengthened by the inclusion of a representative from the social science community.

As things now stand, the social sciences will be among the scientific sectors most deeply affected when the UK leaves the European Union.² The social sciences contribute roughly £24 billion to the UK economy every year,³ and their training and methods account for a large proportion of the service sector that makes up almost 80% of the UK economy.⁴ Social scientists play a vital role in our country, providing the analytical base that helps us do things like understand the economy, growth, and productivity, domestic and international politics, good social and health policy, regional patterns of development, and good business and management practices. In a higher education sector that shapes our nation's future and makes up 2.8% of UK GDP,⁵ the social sciences, arts, and humanities account for over half of all undergraduate and postgraduate students, and almost 40% of academic university staff.⁶ Yet, we know that in comparison to other scientific sectors, it is the social sciences that have received the largest percentage of their total overall funding from EU government bodies in recent years,⁷ at the same time that UK government funding for the social sciences has declined.⁸

Finally, while we recognise the commitments made in the Conservative manifesto to reduce and control immigration, we urge the new Government to rethink its policies in relation to international students. The manifesto would keep international students in the UK's net migration

targets, while simultaneously toughening visa requirements for international students.⁹ Yet evidence shows that UK universities and the UK generally have benefitted greatly from international students, who make up 19% of the UK higher education population,¹⁰ contribute roughly £11 billion to the UK economy,¹¹ boost local economies and regional development, and enrich campus life and academic excellence.¹² On average, international students make up 64% of the postgraduate social science student population at Russell Group Universities.¹³ Indeed, for the social sciences, international students comprise a significant proportion of its students, and bring needed and scarce competencies to the UK in terms of the number and data skills that will be needed to shape a successful industrial strategy, economic and trade policy in a post-Brexit environment.

The current uncertainty for the UK's social science sector is unprecedented, as the UK prepares to leave the EU, ponders a university system and labour market without the skills, fees and diversity provided by international students, and as social science evidence for a range of policies is not drawn on to best effect. Continued support for and attention to the social science sector is in the interest of UK society as a whole.

We hope the new Government will take steps to engage with the social sciences constructively, and take advantage of the UK's world-leading social sciences through the challenging years ahead. We stand ready to do our part.

¹ Campaign for Social Science (2017). The Health of People: How the Social Sciences Can Improve Population Health, <https://campaignforsocialscience.org.uk/healthofpeople/>.

² The Royal Society (May 2017). The role of EU funding UK research and innovation. <https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/projects/uk-research-and-european-union/role-of-EU-in-funding-UK-research/>; and Linda Hantrais and Ashley Lenihan (July 2016) The Implications of the EU Referendum for UK Social Science: Post-referendum Options for UK Social Scientists. LSE Centre for International Studies (CIS/2016/03).

³ Simon Bastow, Patrick Dunleavy, and Jane Tinkler (2014). The Impact of the Social Sciences: How Academics and their Research Make a Difference. Sage: London. See also: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/websitearchive/newsAndMedia/news/archives/2014/01/ImpactofSocialSciences.aspx>

⁴ Office of National Statistics.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/economicoutputandproductivity/output/bulletins/indexofservices/previousReleases>

⁵ Universities UK. The Impact of Universities on the UK Economy (London: Universities UK Facilities Unit, April 2014), 2.

⁶ HESA 2014-15 data (Academic staff) and 2015-16 data (Undergraduate and postgraduate) <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/publications/staff-2014-15/introduction>

and

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/publications/students-2015-16/introduction>

⁷ The Royal Society (May 2017). The role of EU funding UK research and innovation. <https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/projects/uk-research-and-european-union/role-of-EU-in-funding-UK-research/>.

⁸ Linda Hantrais and Ashley Lenihan (July 2016) The Implications of the EU Referendum for UK Social Science: Post-referendum Options for UK Social Scientists. LSE Centre for International Studies (CIS/2016/03).

⁹ Forward Together: Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future. The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto 2017, <https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/manifesto2017/Manifesto2017.pdf>.

¹⁰ Universities UK, <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/Pages/immigration.aspx>.

¹¹ International Unit (2015). International Higher Education in Facts and Figures, London: Higher Education International Unit, 28.

¹² Academy of Social Sciences and the Campaign for Social Science (November 2016). Navigating Brexit: Supporting & Safeguarding UK Higher Education, <https://www.acss.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Navigating-Brexit-Supporting-and-Safeguarding-UK-Higher-Education-November-2016.pdf>.

¹³ Academy of Social Sciences and the Campaign for Social Science (November 2016). Navigating Brexit: Supporting & Safeguarding UK Higher Education, p. 3, <https://www.acss.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Navigating-Brexit-Supporting-and-Safeguarding-UK-Higher-Education-November-2016.pdf>.