



Campaign for Social Science response to 2018 Autumn Budget

The *Campaign for Social Science* welcomes the recognition in the Budget of the importance of science and universities for the long-term prospects of the United Kingdom. The Chancellor acknowledges that it is essential that we ‘invest in infrastructure, in research, in skills and in our regions’ and that all parts of the UK must ‘attract, retain and develop world-leading research talent.’

As the Budget acknowledges, uncertainty for UK universities and research will remain until the Augar Review of Post-18 Education and Funding reports and government responds, and until the details of any Brexit arrangements are announced, which will have implications for research funding and the mobility of researchers. That said, there is much to welcome in the 2018 Budget.

First, the Campaign welcomes new spending announced as part of the Industrial Strategy, though, like [Research Professional](#), we note that yesterday’s announcement would appear to include only £55m of new money. In many of the strands of work being supported, we know that the social sciences are already working in partnership with others. [We believe](#), however, that more strategic and targeted social science research into stimulating R&D expenditure by the private sector will be required if the UK is to meet its goal of achieving overall R&D spending of 2.4% of GDP by 2027. Meeting this goal will also require more targeted work, informed by evidence, to improve productivity, including transferring skills (such as management skills) which we address below.

Nonetheless, that the government continues to be supportive of research and innovation is good news. As we have [previously outlined](#), the social sciences provide essential expertise and robust evidence for addressing ‘how’ knowledge, skills and training support and drive innovation and economic change. Universities play a pivotal role in the spatial re-balancing of regional uneven development across the UK. University collaborations with the private sector, for example, support regional research and development that are a critical component for addressing calls for a high-wage, high-skill economy and genuinely inclusive growth. With that in mind, we hope that more of the National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) will make use of social science knowledge about local and regional issues, such as those related to transport, planning, industrial composition, and skills audits. The creation of new University Enterprise Zones, while welcome, [does not seem to be funded to the level of previously successful Zones](#). Universities can help drive regional growth, but scale of funding, as well as the integration of local evidence and knowledge, are crucial

ingredients for success. We hope that the extension of the Strength in Places Fund may help too.

Investment in AI and data-driven innovation is also welcome but many of the initiatives that surround this spending will benefit from social science. For instance, the UK Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation will find that social science evidence and data are essential in considering the social effects of algorithms and data use by the public. We know that large firms such as Google and Facebook are increasingly aware of the need to bring in a wider range of experts and evidence than that provided by data scientists, and are sure this will be helpful for focussing evidence on outcomes such as the public benefits and harms of such technology.

Universities across all regions and nations of the UK are reliant on being able to continue to attract international-origin workers and research funding. As we recently showed in our report [A World of Talent](#), if we are to maintain a university sector that is globally-recognised for its excellence, it is important that we continue to attract the best global talent and breadth of investment in research and development. Initiatives such as the £100m international fellowship scheme intended to attract talented researchers is therefore to be welcomed. We assume that social scientists will also be eligible for these, and that they will not be limited to specific disciplines. More importantly, initiatives such as these will only work if the post-Brexit visa regime for universities ensures that universities can continue to recruit 'world-leading talent'. The UK will need to get the details of this regime right very quickly.

The future figured heavily in the Chancellor's speech. Long-term thinking is essential for addressing the 'grand challenges' in society. We welcome the government's decision to invest £50m per year to stimulate science and innovation by government, in partnership with industry, to meet 'pressing challenges'. Public health is mentioned as one such challenge – and, as we show in our previous report [Health of People](#), the better use of social science data and more experimentation in social regulation, service delivery and behavioural change are needed to improve UK population health. This is also holds true if we are to better and more effectively address environmental change and other 'grand challenges'.

Finally, the Budget draws attention to the importance of skills and human capital in ensuring UK prosperity over the longer-term. We welcome the extension of support for apprenticeships and later-life learning, though, as we said in our [recent submission to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee](#), more investment in further education to ensure relevant high-quality courses are available is essential. We welcome too the investment in management capability, which social science has shown is one element in the [UK's lagging productivity growth](#). University management departments and business schools are ready to help, and we particularly welcome the creation of a Small Business Leadership Programme to be delivered in partnership with business schools, and the

investment of up to £25 million to the Knowledge Transfer Partnership scheme, that will help to bring the insights of management academics into business.

But we think that further longer-term changes are needed in secondary education for all, with an urgent need to improve the use of number and data skills outside the confines of 'mathematics' curriculum. While the government has put in place measures to support take up of Maths A-levels and AS levels, the *Campaign* believes over-specialisation at secondary level is unhelpful if the aim is to widen engagement with number and data skills among a wider group of students, leading to broader and deeper UK skills across all citizens. We have put forward suggestions in our recent report [Positive Prospects](#).

In sum, the Chancellor's Autumn Statement shows an encouraging understanding of the need to invest in research and development. However, we caution that there needs to be a continued revisiting of the balance of this investment, and better integration and understanding of the need for basic and applied social science research to help address the grand challenges facing society. This will be essential for realising policy priorities in the UK over the decades ahead.