

This Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS) response to the 2021 Budget focusses on the vital role that social science* and social scientists (both in universities and as practitioners) must have if the aims of the measures announced in the 2021 Budget are to be achieved.

The social sciences comprise the societal, economic, behavioural and human data sciences, all to do with the understanding of people, society, the economy, and governance.

First, we should note that many social scientists – economists and others – are already hard at work contributing to public discussions about the policy implications of the Budget measures announced on 3 March. Their analyses range from examining the Budget’s economic impacts and social welfare implications, to research that can help inform how best to use the additional funds for COVID-19 Track and Trace. These contributions to the public good are often unnoticed, and we think it important to acknowledge them here.

AcSS welcomes the Budget 2021 announcement that the [‘Help to Grow’](#) scheme will work with the [Chartered Association of Business Schools](#) to support a management training programme to up-skill managers in 30,000 Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the next 3 years. The fund will help tens of thousands of SMEs get world-class management training from skilled and practical experts, with government contributing 90% of the cost – a real commitment to investment in management education that should help these firms and contribute to UK productivity growth.

AcSS particularly welcomes the announcement of the government [consultation on research and development tax reliefs](#). That consultation will look at the rules governing qualifying research and development activities, stating that “The UK definition is more tightly drawn than some international competitors. Some stakeholders have suggested that areas such as pure mathematics, the creative industries or social sciences should be brought within the definition and allowed to qualify for tax reliefs.” We strongly support allowing social science research to qualify for R&D tax relief, backed by evidence in our recent report, *Vital Business*. We will look forward to compiling further evidence in our response to this consultation.

AcSS also welcomes the general promise to continue improvements in the UK visa system, including a pro-active global outreach strategy, and a streamlining of visa bureaucracy for highly-skilled workers. As we have argued before, in our vision for a future science and social science immigration system for the UK and in our response to the government’s

plans for a points-based system last year, these plans are welcome, but rigid STEM vs non-STEM distinctions are not helpful. Our responses last year were written before the COVID-19 pandemic, but even so we highlighted public health and regional development, among other subjects, as areas where social science research and expertise makes real practical contributions. Since then, the evidence about the importance of being able to recruit the best and brightest social scientists, including those in early careers with number and data skills that are scarce in the UK, has only strengthened. It is essential that the new visa systems and the promised streamlining of the application process takes account of these issues.

The government's plans for the various 'levelling up' funds will need to take account of the ways that social sciences not only can but *must* inform the development and evaluation of bids for City and Growth deals, Towns deals, and other projects under 'Build Back Better'. Taken together, these schemes will amount to an investment of significant public funds to address local and regional economic, social, employment and educational development needs, as well as physical infrastructure. But even with physical infrastructure, both the development of projects and the criteria to evaluate them will require social science evidence. Understanding how many people will use a new bridge, how it will shorten commute times, what effects it may have on traffic and towns, and what other behaviours or social effects it may have, inherently requires social science evidence.

The government's plans will require local authorities and associated MPs to nominate candidates for the funds. But we think it is essential that social science evidence about who benefits, how many benefit, and how best they may benefit, are laid out clearly. This will not only aid in value-for-money considerations, but in ensuring that development plans are explicit about these issues.

Local university-based social scientists are already involved in this work, which is doubly important since local authority research and data analytics capacity has been affected by cuts in local government over the years. Social scientists – such as those working on local demography, local economies, local skills and schools and what works in life-long learning, local and regional development planning, local travel-to-work areas, and the geo-spatial dimensions of all of these – have already stepped in to help local authorities better understand their needs and drive local and regional growth. So while universities are referred to in government plans as 'potential relevant local stakeholders and partners', we believe that social scientists, as well as STEM scientists, will be vital partners to help plan and develop bids, and to advise on criteria for evaluating them. We shall certainly encourage all social scientists – including our Fellows, member Learned Societies, supporting universities

and others, including social scientists not based in universities – to engage with urgency in this important work.

Finally, like many others, including the [Royal Society](#), we are disappointed that government did not announce its plans for funding the UK's association to Horizon Europe or act to restore research funding to the UK global aid budget. We look forward to further announcements, and note that on issues such as climate change, ageing, public health, and sustainable development across the world, social science knowledge is essential.

* Social sciences comprise the societal, economic, behavioural and human data sciences, and include a wide range of disciplines, including: anthropology; architecture, building and planning; business, finance and management; economics; education; human geography; law; politics; sociology; social policy and social work; and social psychology.

For further information please email: Sharon Witherspoon MBE FAcSS (Head of Policy) at s.witherspoon@acss.org.uk or call: +44 (0) 777 220 7398

About the Academy of Social Sciences

The Academy of Social Sciences is the national academy of academics, learned societies and practitioners in the social sciences. Its mission is to promote social science in the United Kingdom for public benefit. The Academy is composed of approximately 1400 individual Fellows, 46 Member Learned Societies, and a number of affiliates. Together, this body of organisations is a community of some 90,000 social scientists. Academy Fellows are leading professional social scientists from academia and the public and private sectors. The Campaign for Social Science is an integral part of the Academy.