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# Measurement of social and cultural infrastructure

*Response deadline: 17:00 BST, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023*

The British Academy is commissioning a major new research element as part of its work theme on social and cultural infrastructure. The research will focus on the measurement of social and cultural infrastructure.

## Background

### **Social and cultural infrastructures: context and aims**

Social and cultural infrastructures refer to the spaces, services and structures that support the quality of life of a nation, region, city or local community. These spaces, services and structures bring people together and strengthen the social and cultural fabric of communities. It is an area that has been brought to the fore by the Academy's previous work on [Cohesive Societies](#) and the [COVID Decade](#) evidence review and policy reports.

Additionally, *social infrastructure* is a concept that has become embedded in the languages of policymaking and academia over the last few years. The government's Levelling Up White Paper alone contains nearly 50 mentions of the phrase, either used on its own or alongside the phrase *social capital* (the latter being a much narrower concept). The importance of social infrastructure to people and communities is well understood both internationally and within communities across England, even if 'social infrastructure' is not necessarily a concept or expression commonly used among the general public.

The Academy's social and cultural infrastructure work theme aims to explore the importance of social and cultural infrastructure for policymaking, including investigating how social and cultural infrastructure policy interventions can address deepening spatial inequalities and contribute to recovery from COVID-19.

### **Previous British Academy work in this area**

The [British Academy](#) and [Power to Change](#) came together in early 2022 to collectively explore questions relating to social infrastructure and its value to different communities. The two organisations jointly commissioned the [Bennett Institute for Public Policy](#) and the [Institute for Community Studies](#) to undertake two related research projects. The first of these explored [examples of international policy interventions](#) that aim to strengthen social infrastructure to draw out learning for UK policymakers. The second involved [peer research into community definitions and understandings](#) of social infrastructure in England.

In January 2023, [Space for Community: Strengthening our Social Infrastructure](#) brought together the findings of these two research projects. This report aims to deepen our understanding of social infrastructure, and so give policymakers (local, regional and national), civil society leaders, and communities themselves the insights needed to strengthen this infrastructure and help meet current and future challenges.

The research findings emphasise the need to understand the value of listening and responding to community voices, and the importance of considering accessibility and inclusion. The research has shown, in particular, the importance of social infrastructure as a ‘seed-bed’ for the creation, enhancement and maintenance of social capital, a vital element of the social fabric of our communities. It has also shown the importance of ‘accidental’ social infrastructure – those places which are intended to serve a different purpose, but which nevertheless act as social infrastructure. Supermarkets, for example, can serve as vital spaces for people to connect with each other to stave off loneliness.

The report explores three aspects of social infrastructure: 1) the use of social infrastructure to support the social fabric of places, 2) treating social infrastructure as an infrastructure, and 3) defining the purpose of social infrastructure. For each of these three aspects, policy considerations arising from the findings of the research have been drawn out.

## Objectives and Approach

Following the culmination of this first phase, the British Academy is now seeking to commission research focused on the measurement on social and cultural infrastructure. While the first phase of work included a consideration of *cultural* infrastructure to some extent, it is planned that the next phase of work will foreground the cultural aspects more explicitly, and so the following sections of this document refers to ‘social and cultural infrastructure’. Based on initial feedback, stakeholder engagement, and as a natural progression from the aspects explored so far, the next phase of work will investigate how social and cultural infrastructure can be measured, and so enable a better articulation of its purpose, presence, scale and value. As a starting point we have carried out some initial mapping of existing work and initiatives in this area in-house and this could serve as a starting point for this commissioned research. This initial work can be shared with the successful tenderer when the work commences.

A focus on measurement and metrics in relation to social and cultural infrastructure ties in closely to ongoing policy agendas such as Levelling Up and recovery from COVID 19. It is also timely in terms of thinking on interrelated concepts such as that of a national place standard, or a universal basic infrastructure. Recent work by Belong on measuring social cohesion also complements a consideration of measuring social and cultural infrastructure.

### **Overarching research questions**

- **What are the key features of social and cultural infrastructure that can and should be measured in order to more fully demonstrate its purpose, presence, scale and value?**
- **How can this measurement be represented and operationalised in ways that enable policymakers and others to easily understand social and cultural infrastructure in ways that can directly inform policy decisions?**

Through this work we are seeking to understand what a measurement framework and approach to social and cultural infrastructure would look like, but recognise that the limitations of data collection might prevent the full development and piloting of this framework into a useable policy tool. However the research proposal should set out what may or may not be feasible on this front. Under any proposal, the research should seek to incorporate nuance, breadth and multi-layered thinking, partly through reflecting the depth and breadth of insight from across the SHAPE disciplines. The research should also explore community perceptions of social and cultural infrastructure.

Our initial analysis has found that existing measurements/metrics of social and cultural infrastructure overlook or underplay many areas or ‘domains’ that are central to the Academy’s disciplines, such as culture, the environment, and the role of the private sector. Additionally, incorporating thinking about social and cultural infrastructure and its measurement from the perspective of different groups within society, particularly those that are marginalised or under-represented in policy such as children could be useful. Thinking about these different domains in the measurement of social and cultural infrastructure would help provide new conceptualisations or principles, which would be a first step towards new measurement tools.

A further perspective that could inform this work is that of conceptualising how different pieces of social and cultural infrastructure fit together. This would involve thinking about social and cultural infrastructure in terms of a process, what the mechanisms for implementing the process are, and placing all the evidence and information assembled into one conceptual framework.

Previous British Academy programmes should also be drawn upon to inform this work, as well as relevant policy agendas and priorities. For example, the Academy’s programme on Cohesive Societies aimed to capture work related to social cohesion around five key themes, which could inform work on the measurement of social and cultural infrastructure. The five themes of the programme were: Cultural memory and tradition; Social economy; Meaning and mechanisms of social responsibility; Identity and belonging; and Care for the future.

Additional perspectives that could helpfully build on the policy considerations advanced in *Space for Community: Strengthening our Social Infrastructure* (listed below), would also be welcome.

- Community voices should be involved in the design and maintenance of social infrastructure – thinking about social and cultural infrastructure from the perspective of different groups within society, and what aspects they deem important, is vital when considering measurement tools.
- The importance of ‘purpose’ in relation to how we define social and cultural infrastructure will also need to be considered in relation to measurement indices and their ultimate use. *Space for Community: Strengthening our Social Infrastructure* noted that national, regional and local policymakers should work with communities to develop approaches that manage competing purposes. Also, that an understanding of

the different purposes that people use social and cultural infrastructure for requires policymakers and providers to work with communities to try and develop solutions that meet the needs of the widest range of people, whilst simultaneously addressing questions of power. A focus on ‘purpose’ has also been foregrounded in other areas of the Academy’s public policy work, for example the [Future of the Corporation](#) programme reviewed the role of business in society and explored purpose in relation to business. The programme’s final report put forward eight principles for purposeful business.

In addition, the framework of place, scale and time used previously in the Academy’s public policy work, such as the COVID Decade publications<sup>1</sup>, will also be an essential part of the frame for addressing this question, and in providing a conceptual basis. *Place* refers to the spatial areas that people identify with and/or that are boundaries for policy and practical implementation; *scale* refers to the level and size of the implementation (e.g. from hyperlocal to national and from physical to virtual); and *time* involves considering broad rather than narrow conceptualisations (e.g. the duration of a phenomenon, its rapidity, its trajectory, and its historical start or endpoints).

Finally, we would expect the research teams to build upon and take insight from the Levelling Up Capitals framework, which outlines six ‘capitals’ that can be drivers of spatial disparity.<sup>2</sup> The six capitals are:

- Physical capital – infrastructure, machines and housing.
- Human capital – the skills, health and experience of the workforce.
- Intangible capital – innovation, ideas and patents.
- Financial capital – resources supporting the financing of companies.
- Social capital – the strength of communities, relationships and trust.
- Institutional capital – local leadership, capacity and capability

### **Further details**

We envisage that this research commission will divide into two stages, as set out below:

- 1) defining parameters for the task
- 2) developing the measurement framework and any associated pilot testing that might be feasible

### **Stage 1: Defining parameters for the task**

This first stage would involve an expansion of existing work on indexes for measuring social and cultural infrastructure into a synthesis, which would identify commonalities, differences, and gaps, in the existing measures.

### **Stage 2: Developing the measurement framework and any associated pilot testing that might be feasible**

This stage would involve developing the synthesis achieved in the first stage into a model or tool for measuring social and cultural infrastructure against a set of expected policy outcomes. This would involve an iterative process in which the work of the research team would be closely

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Section 2.3 (p18) in Shaping the COVID decade: Addressing the long-term societal impacts of COVID-19, The British Academy, London (2021) <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/3239/Shaping-COVID-decade-addressing-long-term-societal-impacts-COVID-19.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See for example p5 of Levelling Up the United Kingdom: Executive Summary, at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1095544/Executive\\_Summary.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1095544/Executive_Summary.pdf)

intertwined with policy-facing activities led by the Academy's Public Policy Team (see section below) and so would require a model of co-production. The final output would be the basis of a tool or model of existing indexes and metrics for measuring social infrastructure which could be used to help inform and guide policy development and implementation.

### **Stage 3: Testing the measure via a pilot in defined policy areas (optional staged approach)**

Following the completion of stages 1 and 2 it is envisaged that the research team would work with the Academy, and one or more other partner organisations yet to be confirmed, to pilot the index framework against specific policy areas in specific contexts. Prior to any piloting the research team, in conjunction with the Academy policy team, and taking into consideration the evidence and insights gathered in stages 1 and 2 and in any Academy-led activities, would define criteria for what constitutes successful measurement of social and cultural infrastructure. The Academy would expect to work with the research team to develop and agree the policy areas and locations for this pilot testing, but the bidder should outline initial ideas or ways of approaching this pilot in their bid. Note that these costs should be included as indicative in a bid, but should not be considered within the current budget envelope at this stage as we will treat stage 3 as an option to add on dependent upon the findings of stage 1 and 2. All proposals should consider value for money of the proposed approach.

## **Outputs**

We expect as a minimum a written report, outlined below and suitable for publication after peer review, including case studies or other supporting material as appropriate. We anticipate that the commissioned team will work closely with staff at the British Academy throughout the project to ensure complementarity between the research and the policy-led activities the Academy team will be leading on. We also anticipate the commissioned team will be invited to participate in interactive stakeholder workshops and roundtables with the policy community and other stakeholders over the course of the project as appropriate. To some extent, these activities will be developed in conjunction with the detailed development of the commissioned research, to ensure strong coherence and synergies exist between the two elements.

We expect at least one interim report output and regular project updates (e.g. via on-line meetings) as part of the liaison with the Academy's policy team. The Academy will also have a high-level steering group advising this project and so the research team should consider this and the opportunity to interact with the senior stakeholders who sit on this group in its proposals.

We expect that one central output will consist of a final report that covers both stage 1) framing the task and stage 2) developing the measure, as above. This will include the synthesis of existing indexes and metrics that could be applied to social and cultural infrastructure, accompanied by relevant conceptualisation and discussion. In relation to stage 2 this central output would articulate a potential model or models and discuss their potential development and implementation, including a focus on their applicability to specific policy issues, scenarios or case studies.

This central output could also be accompanied by a range of other outputs where appropriate, for example papers for academic peer reviewed journals, report briefs, infographics, interactive datasets or webpages, and audio or video content. Whatever form they take, outputs should translate the findings of the work into meaningful insights or recommendations for policy. We expect projects to consider the relevant policy context and challenges, audiences, and approaches when developing outputs.

In the long term, this work will feed into future policy programmes in the British Academy around the topic of social and cultural infrastructure. Please note, all outputs will be owned by the British Academy and the commissioned group will have a creative license output for the published works.

Respondents should note the following timetable:

- Tender decision announced by 06<sup>th</sup> October 2023
- Initial meeting in October (w/c 9<sup>th</sup> October 2023)
- Initial inception report confirming the project approach and analytical approach by November (w/c 20 November 2023)
- Second interim report with progress update by March 2024 (w/c 18 March 2024)
- Presentation and participation in British Academy-led policy-focused activities (timing tbc, likely January-April 2024)
- Update to Academy's public policy committee on progress towards final draft report (May/June 2024)
- Delivery of final draft report for peer review by June 2024 (w/c 10 June 2024)
- Delivery of final report not later than end August 2024

### **Responding to this invitation**

We welcome responses from groups which indicate how they can bring their expertise and synthesise across existing evidence bases. Responses should be no longer than 10 pages and should outline:

- The main research questions and how you will conceptualise social and cultural infrastructure for the purposes of the study,
- A description of the research design and methods to be used to address the questions, including existing data or research analysis that will be drawn on,
- A short description of existing group expertise, and
- An outline of resources and a justification which demonstrates value for money.

In addition to your response, please attach your CV(s) as an addendum.

#### *Proposal assessment criteria*

- The relevance of the proposed research questions and demonstrated understanding of the relevant theory, practice and related bodies of work to those outlined in the invitation to tender
- The conceptual, theoretical and methodological rigour of the proposed work
- The expertise of the researcher / research team and their experience in conducting studies using similar research methodologies
- The experience of the researcher / research team in communicating with policy audiences and producing outputs that can inform and shape policy
- The feasibility and appropriateness of the research design, methods and programme of work
- The demonstrated value for money

Please note, the tender is open to researchers in UK institutions only. Responses should contain a brief outline of resource implications and proposals should not exceed £100,000 (excluding VAT).

50% is payable on commission, 30% on delivery of an interim report, and 20% on completion. Indirect costs are not eligible for consideration. The response should confirm the group is able to deliver according to the timetable provided above.

As noted above, we also expect all teams to specify a dedicated person(s) who will liaise regularly with a British Academy team member. Responses should be submitted via Flexi-Grant by **17:00 BST on 20 September**.

We are happy to discuss the invitation to tender and offer further guidance if required. Please contact [policy@thebritishacademy.ac.uk](mailto:policy@thebritishacademy.ac.uk)