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# Sections

March 2024

Chief Executive’s Report: Paper 1

<b>This paper is for noting</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>
<i>To update you on key Academy matters not covered elsewhere on your agenda. This paper complements the Programmes and Activities paper for November 2023 Council which provides a more detailed picture.</i>
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>
<i>None</i>
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## Researchers at risk

We have long called for more permanent support for researchers at risk around the world. As Fellows are aware, we were successful in obtaining funding from the UK government (and then supplemented by other sources at a lower level) to work with Cara and the other national academies to support Ukrainian researchers at risk. We have been able to support nearly 180 of them, and recently were able to extend their Fellowships to a third year. Unfortunately and despite regular engagement on this issue, we have not been able to access support for regions other than Ukraine. Julian Lewis MP recently asked a [Parliamentary Question](#) on this matter but the response from the Government suggested we are unlikely to see any widening of support in the short run. We will continue to press the case, including before and after the upcoming General Election, and to support CARA in their work. We recently hosted a fundraising event with them to mark their 90th birthday.

## Horizon

In January we held a lovely joint event with the other National Academies and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology at the Royal Society to celebrate the

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UK's association to Horizon Europe. We convened a lunch with senior European and UK stakeholders including Michelle Donelan (DSIT Secretary of State) and Iliana Ivanova (European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth). There were then a series of panels including one chaired by our President which featured a number of successful researchers including two Fellows of the Academy – Professor Aditi Lahiri FBA and Professor Andrew Jordan FBA. It was great to be able to celebrate together, after a very long period of uncertainty, and to help bring colleagues from the UK and Europe together with the hope that these links will forge closer collaboration in the future.

### **University funding and the impact of humanities and social sciences**

We are aware of the funding pressures that universities are under, with inflation having eroded the value of tuition fees. This and other factors such as the lifting of the student cap is in turn is placing pressures on humanities and social science departments. Whilst the Academy does not intervene on individual university decisions, we are making the case at policy level for a sustainable funding system for higher education. We have consistently called for the universities brief to be united with the research brief within government – currently universities sit under the Department for Education and research sits within the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

In January we launched a [report](#) on the impact of humanities and social sciences research. It shows how our disciplines impact across a huge range of part of society – from informing the development of video games, innovations in the NHS or pathways to sustainability and is accompanied by a browsable [database](#) of the case studies which can be searched by topic. This is part of our ongoing work to build the evidence base for and make the case for our disciplines and we are sharing the report with a range of policymakers and other stakeholders.

### **British Library**

Fellows will be aware of the major cyberattack suffered by the British Library last year which has affected its services, with a knock-on effect on the research community. We have been surprised by how little awareness there has been in Whitehall and amongst MPs about what has happened to this critical part of the research infrastructure. We want to see the British Library receive adequate support and funding to rebuild, and have flagged the issues with both DCMS (the main sponsor department of the Library) and with the Department for Science (which funds research). We were also, through the Library's advisory board, able to flag concerns raised by Fellows about the communication to the research community, and indicate that we were happy to help if they needed any input or support. Thanks so much to those of you that flagged the issues to us.

### **Early career researcher network**

We announced that we are [opening the fourth cluster](#) of our Early Career Researcher Network – this time in London. This is very exciting as obviously London has a big research community and so we hope to see strong demand and already have 336 London ECRs signed up making total numbers exceed 3,500. The cluster will be through a

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partnership led by the University of Greenwich, King's College London, Middlesex University and University College London. The Network is helping us become a home for the wider humanities and social science community and to support the next generation of scholars.

### **Equitable partnerships / international funding**

We have recently launched a call for challenge oriented research grants which aim to deepen international research collaboration between the UK and a range of countries. The call is open to both UK based and International Principal Investigators ensuring that the Academy is enabling equitable partnerships wherever possible. The Programme consists of eight themes ranging from anti-microbial resistance to power and voice in climate action. This is part of our wider extensive international programme which is going from strength to strength.

### **Grants assessment**

We are aware of a number of concerns about Flexigrant, and discussed the issues recently with Section Chairs. Improvements are underway to address these issues including streamlining processes, ensuring clearer communication, and the implementation of a CRM. We are grateful to all Fellows who help with grants assessment – it is a really important contribution and helps support excellent research.

### **Vice President Social Science**

The Academy is recruiting for a new Vice President for Social Sciences to take over from Professor Conor Gearty FBA from summer 2025. If you might be interested or want to suggest a Fellow who may be suited to the role then please do get in touch ([h.shah@thebritishacademy.ac.uk](mailto:h.shah@thebritishacademy.ac.uk)) – expressions of interest need to be with me by 22 March. It is a fantastic and varied role, and alongside their portfolio, Vice Presidents sit on Council and the Standing Committee of Council, so play an important role in guiding the overall direction of the Academy.

### **Building transformation**

The building transformation continues to progress, albeit with some delays which are to be expected of all large and complex projects in Grade I buildings. We expect the rebuild of the lower floors to be completed by the summer, and the AV fit out by the autumn. This means that in person Section meetings (with hybrid options) will resume in the autumn and we are looking forward to welcoming you back to the building. As part of our Building Transformation Project, we will be refurbishing and relocating the Fellows Room to provide a larger more comfortable space. The new space will be on the ground floor and so easily accessible from street level, in the two rooms to the left of the Reception desk at Carlton House Terrace and will incorporate our library.

There is an interactive demonstration of the changes we are making in [this section of the Academy's website](#) dedicated to the project. Sustainability is at the heart of our plans – minimising the environmental impact of the new spaces for example by using air source

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heat pumps and we have secured planning permission to install double glazing, so far unprecedented in a building of this kind and age.

Thank you to those who have already added their support – we have now raised over £8.3 million of our goal of £9.6 million for the project. The public appeal to raise £500,000 has reached £300,000 with support received from Fellows, external committee members and staff of the Academy. If you would like to support the project you can do so through our website or please contact the Development Team – Jennifer Hawton will be happy to help.

### **Fellows' week**

There was enthusiasm at the Section chairs' meeting to rename the Sections week in the autumn to 'Fellows' week' and to combine it with the Fellows engagement events. We will trial this and other changes in the coming months as we are keen to find ways to deepen your engagement. Fellows indicated that they would prefer for these events to happen in person and hence we have postponed events planned for March (which would have been held online) to the autumn.

### **Summer Showcase / public events**

The Academy's Summer Showcase will run from 11-13 July, with Fellows invited to the private view on the evening of 11 July. This year we will be returning to exhibits by our funded researchers alongside talks and workshops. We are also rolling out a new programme of public events from the autumn once the building transformation is complete.