

Autumn Budget 2025 Stakeholder Representation – The British Academy

The social sciences, humanities and arts are central to the UK's success as a secure, prosperous and globally connected, democratic nation. They provide the insight needed to tackle complex challenges — from economic growth and technological change to public trust and global insecurity. As the UK's national academy for these disciplines, [The British Academy](https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk) brings together this expertise to inform national debate and support effective policymaking.

We welcomed the Chancellor's decision to maintain investment in research and development in the 2025 Spending Review announced in June 2025. Long-term investment in research is a vital engine for the UK's prosperity, health, and security.

In our submission to the Autumn Budget 2025, the British Academy sets out three ways Government can harness the SHAPE (Social sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy) disciplines and continue to support its ambitions for resilient economic growth and sustainability for its world leading research expertise across all disciplines.

1. Ensure the resilience and impact of higher education by providing a sustainable framework for the sector's role and funding

Universities enrich every part of national life. They create opportunity, anchor regional economies and foster vibrant, culturally confident communities. Higher education contributes around £130 billion annually to the UK economy and supports over 700,000 jobs, while also educating future leaders and generating ideas that shape our shared future. Safeguarding the health and breadth of this system is of shared national interest.

Yet many universities face acute financial pressure. We welcomed the tuition fee increase in autumn 2024, but after a decade of real-terms erosion, institutions are struggling to maintain provision. This is already driving regional inequality in provision, limiting opportunity for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and undermining the Government's mission to ensure opportunity for all. Cuts to courses and departments, particularly in the SHAPE disciplines, threaten student choice, innovation, and the UK's research base. The knowledge and skills developed through these subjects are in strong demand: they help us to counter misinformation, global disorder and vaccine hesitancy; support childhood learning, climate adaptation behaviours, and good governance; and underpin cultural understanding, community cohesion and the social contract.

Recent policy shifts bring both opportunities and risks to these disciplines and the strength of the sector. The Academy welcomes efforts to reduce the financial pressures students face with the reintroduction of maintenance grants. However, we oppose the proposed levy on international student fees. Using a levy, which fluctuates based on international student recruitment, to fund maintenance grants is unsustainable; it risks further destabilising universities, undermining the UK's competitiveness and the global outlook that underpins our success.

These developments reflect deeper structural weaknesses in the higher education policy framework. Successive governments have treated it as self-regulating and a reflection of genuine demand, while in practice exerting strong influence through funding incentives, regulation, and public messaging about subject value. The result is a system that is neither a true market nor one that allows institutions to act autonomously. As a result, the system's aims to improve quality, responsiveness, and financial sustainability have not been met. Anticipated policies focussed on increased, early specialisation in education, the prioritisation of technical and employer-led routes, and a tiered approach to the research base and breadth of our world-leading institutions risks further compounding these issues.

To address these challenges, we call for:

- **An urgent review of higher education funding** to create a sustainable model resilient to regional and socio-economic inequalities which limit student choice, with clearer guidance on how far higher education providers can collaborate without breaching competition law.
- **A broad, balanced and interconnected school curriculum** encouraging students to study a range of disciplines and languages, providing the UK with an unparalleled skills base which will provide resilience in the face of growing social and geo-political uncertainties.
- **The withdrawal of the proposed international student fees income levy**, complemented with a reduction in the cost of visas and associated fees for international students.

To support the Government, the British Academy is already:

- **Supporting the next generation of researchers** through our [Early Career Researcher Network \(EORN\)](#), diversity of [fellowship and small research grants programmes](#).
- **Expanding the SHAPE Observatory** to analyse the health and research capacities of our disciplines.
- **Equipping the sector with data visualisation and analysis tools** to demonstrate the collective impact of individual institution decision making on student access and the knock-on effects on graduate outcomes and the UK skills base.

2. Provide the support needed to attract and retain global talent and maintain the UK's international research collaborations

We welcome the Government's commitment to engage in negotiations with the EU to associate to the next Framework Programme from 2028. This further association should be secured as soon as achievable. However, uncertainty about the future of the International Science Partnerships Fund (ISPF) and reductions in Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending are reducing the UK's capability to collaborate internationally.

The Government should grasp the current moment to attract and retain global talent. It should look to invest in existing well established and successful schemes such as our International Fellowships and Global Professorships, which support excellent international talent, covering all career stages, to come to the UK. We are concerned that the new Global Talent Taskforce is not maximising the potential that exists in the sector right now to access global talent or address national needs. For example, our flagship International Fellowships for early career researchers see increases year-on-year in number and quality of applications, with 59% of this year's projects achieving a rating of excellent, but only 3.3% actually being successful, due to funding pressure. We urge an ambitious expansion of such global talent attraction programmes, across all disciplines.

The Immigration White Paper has brought instability to the sector. Institutions lack clarity over rules for Indefinite Leave to Remain for current and prospective Global Talent visa holders. In these circumstances, researchers, innovators and organisations across the UK are unable to plan for the future. This is not the long-term stable framework international research and innovation requires.

To address these challenges, we call for:

- **The UK to associate** to the next EU Framework Programme for Research & Innovation and to rejoin Erasmus+.
- **Uplifting core funding for global talent attraction and retention**, including utilising the funding for non-ODA ISPF for this purpose.
- **Lower barriers to international collaboration and research** mobility through lower visa costs, the removal of the Immigration Health Surcharge, and sanctuary for researchers at risk.

To support the Government, the British Academy is already:

- **Boosting participation in Horizon Europe** to reintegrate UK-based researchers into EU programmes and networks.
- **Prioritising the retention and attraction of global talent** through maximising the potential in the sector by uplifting existing programmes across disciplines.
- **Putting equitable partnerships and knowledge systems strengthening** at the heart of our international research programmes.
- **Convening expertise on global challenges**, including on [international \(dis\)order](#), the world economy, transnational and planetary challenges, and violence and insecurity.
- **Acting as an endorsing body** for the Global Talent visa, including 1,101 processing applications in 2024-25.

3. Use insights and evidence — from all disciplines — to address society's biggest challenges

Tackling global challenges – from climate change and technological transformation to pandemic preparedness and democratic resilience – depends on contributions from across a wide range of disciplines. The interaction between [SHAPE and STEM](#) is essential to translating discovery into innovation that benefits people and places, ensuring innovation is ethical, inclusive and sustainable. Investing in research across the full disciplinary spectrum is not only an economic imperative but also vital to social cohesion and the UK's global standing.

The British Academy's work on [economic strategy](#) highlights the need to invest in foundational economic infrastructures: strengthening the capabilities and institutions that underpin our ability to invest in innovation and improve productivity. Building a resilient knowledge economy demands long-term commitment and coherent funding.

The Academy's groundbreaking study of the [long-term societal impact of the Covid-19 pandemic](#) revealed how crucial it is for the UK to invest in social and cultural, as well as physical, infrastructure to ensure the country is resilient to future crises and that the most vulnerable do not bear the greatest burden.

To address these challenges, we call for:

- **The UK to be a leading country in the G7 on R&D intensity** with stable and regionally distributed investment across all disciplines.
- **Stronger support for museums, libraries and archives** as essential research infrastructure.
- **Improved collaboration across ministerial portfolios** to align higher education and research policy.

To support the Government, the British Academy is already:

- **Distributing over £70m of research funding** over 24/25, spanning discovery research, cross sector and international mobility and the [British International Research Institutes](#).
- **Supporting the Government on an integrated economic strategy** through our policy programme with HM Treasury and the Department for Business and Trade.

- **Enabling the UK's workforce to be flexible, creative and multilingual**; in sectors where the UK is a global leader, skills learnt from studying SHAPE disciplines foster resilience in a dynamic and rapidly shifting economic context.
- **Providing the evidence for a broader framework for national resilience**, from how to measure the value of social and cultural infrastructure and understanding what makes a good digital society, to how the UK responds to the challenge of Net Zero and the drivers of global (dis)order.

About The British Academy

The British Academy is the UK's national academy for the humanities and social sciences. We mobilise these disciplines to understand the world and shape a brighter future. From artificial intelligence to climate change, from building prosperity to improving well-being – today's complex challenges can only be resolved by deepening our insight into people, cultures and societies. We invest in researchers and projects across the UK and overseas, engage the public with fresh thinking and debates, and bring together scholars, government, business and civil society to influence policy for the benefit of everyone.

For more information about the British Academy and our work please contact us at:
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