



Review of post-18 education and funding: call for evidence

A submission from the British Academy
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Summary

1. The British Academy welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Government's review of post-18 education and funding. We recognise that the post-18 system needs review, but it is vital that any changes maintain the UK's position as a world leader in the humanities and social sciences and enable everyone to reap the benefits of these subjects.
2. The main points made in our submission are:
 - The arts, humanities and social sciences are vital to a thriving economy, vibrant culture and cohesive society. They help deliver the skills on which the service sector, which makes up 80% of the UK's economy, depends, and which are needed in a world where technological, socio-economic, geopolitical and demographic changes are already transforming the way we work and live.
 - A wholly market-driven approach to education provision brings with it risks and perverse incentives, encouraging short-term rather than strategic management, and potentially stifling growth and innovation. Setting fee levels based on graduate earnings fails to recognise that the return from higher education is not determined solely, or even primarily, by the subject studied, and must be measured in terms broader than the purely economic. Setting fee levels based on how much subjects cost to teach will limit the extent to which institutions are able to plan for, and invest in, innovative approaches to provision and to maintain provision in subjects which are strategically important to the UK but are less popular.
 - Maintaining healthy, innovative and evolving disciplines will help to meet national skill and knowledge needs, within both higher education and the research base. A long term, strategic view is needed, not solely based on student choice, market demand and immediate research priorities. This requires an observatory function to monitor institutional and student behaviours and the needs of the whole knowledge base. The British Academy, if requested by Government, is willing to consult with the Royal Society and others about how the National Academies might fulfil this role across the whole subject base to ensure the long-term UK benefit.
3. We look forward to engaging further with Government and the panel as the Review progresses. We would be happy to facilitate meetings between the panel and the humanities and social sciences community, as well as enabling the review to draw upon the expertise of the Academy's Fellowship.

Introduction

4. The British Academy is the UK's national academy for the humanities and social sciences. A Fellowship of over 1000 of the country's leading academics, it exists to promote and champion its disciplines. The humanities and social sciences provide a critical lens through which society can address the wide-ranging challenges we face today.

5. Given that the British Academy is not a provider of higher or further education or apprenticeships and our remit to identify potential threats to the continued health of our disciplines, we have structured our response around four key themes, rather than attempt to answer all the questions in the survey. These themes are:
 - The value of the humanities and social sciences in delivering future skills needs
 - Choice, access and competition in current and future systems
 - The potential differentiation of tuition fees by subject
 - The safeguarding of strategically important subjects and diverse provision

The value of the humanities and social sciences in delivering future skills needs

6. Arts, humanities and social science (AHSS) students make up 55% of university students in the UK, totalling around 1.25 million students. The subjects are also widely offered across the further education sector and through apprenticeships. The wide provision of, and demand for, AHSS courses reflects the fact that the UK economy relies heavily on skills associated with the study of AHSS. The Academy's report *The Right Skills* has provided recent, cogent evidence of this.¹
7. The UK's world-leading sectors of the economy – such as the creative industries, financial services, legal and professional services, including the university and research sector itself - all rely predominantly on AHSS skills and they are utilised at all levels of employment, including the most senior.²
8. Broadly these skills are: communication and collaboration, research and analysis, and attitudes and behaviours characterised by independence and adaptability, a global mindset, and intercultural understanding. Moreover, AHSS subjects provide people with the knowledge and skills to be active and participatory citizens who can critically engage in democratic society. In addition to this set of core skills, there are skills more specific to individual AHSS disciplines, including languages, high-level numeracy, qualitative analysis and data processing skills, geospatial skills and practical production skills, content production, recording and broadcasting, and archival retrieval skills.
9. Many of these skills are not unique to the study of AHSS, but these disciplines provide a particular context for their development with an understanding of the human dimension in which they can be applied. An analysis of responses to the Higher Education Academy's UK Engagement Survey, which collects information on how a student's experience influences their skills development, suggests that AHSS degrees may be more effective than STEM degrees in enabling students to develop

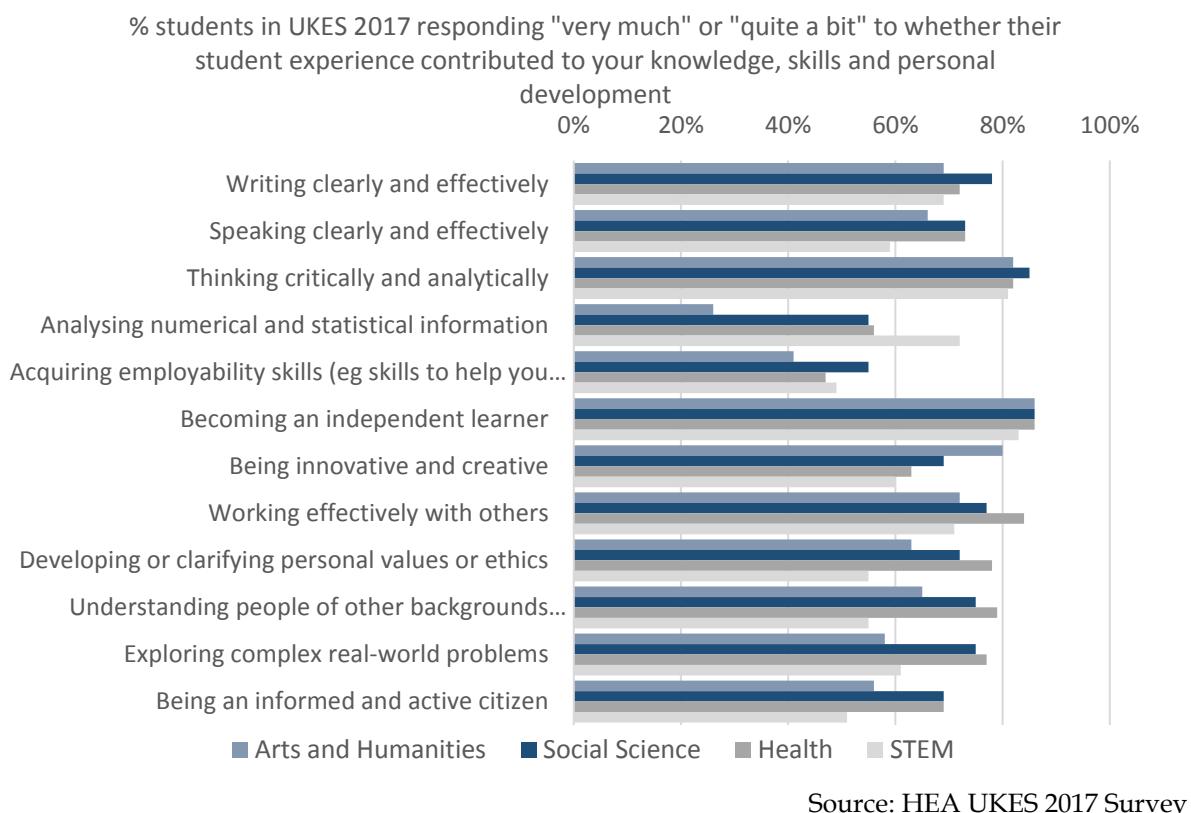
¹ British Academy (2017), *The Right Skills: Celebrating Skills in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*

<https://www.britac.ac.uk/publications/right-skills-celebrating-skills-arts-humanities-and-social-sciences-ahss>

² Ibid

skills in a number of key areas to UK economy and society, such as innovation and creativity, speaking clearly and effectively, and understanding others.

- As summarised in the graphic below, overall, a higher proportion of students in social sciences stated that their experience contributed “very much” or “quite a bit” to their skills development in 11 out of 12 areas compared with STEM students. A higher proportion of Arts and Humanities students stated their experience contributed “very much” or “quite a bit” to their skills development in 8 out of 12 areas compared with STEM students.



Future supply of skills

- In terms of delivering a post-18 education system that meets the future economic and social needs of the country, AHSS subjects will play an essential, enhanced role. Many of the key future global challenges are interdisciplinary in nature and require the combination of knowledge and skills from STEM and AHSS. As the British Academy's report *Crossing Paths* showed, interdisciplinary working relies on strong disciplines and also encourages innovation within existing provision.³ Changes in the labour market from new technologies will increase the demand for a broad range of skills which include the creativity, communication and problem-solving skills found most prominently at the core of AHSS subjects.

³ British Academy (2016), *Crossing Paths: Interdisciplinary Institutions, Careers, Education and Applications*

<https://www.britac.ac.uk/interdisciplinarity>

12. Language skills are vital for trade, security and diplomacy and are likely to become even more important after Brexit.⁴ The shortage of foreign-language skills may be costing the UK 3.5% of GDP.⁵ 71% of UK Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) surveyed in the Academy's *Born Global* project agreed that future executives would need language skills. Over half agreed that graduates who only spoke English were at a disadvantage in the jobs market, and that additional foreign languages would be helpful to extend business opportunities in future.⁶

13. The demand for quantitative skills in the UK workforce will continue to grow, with changes in the nature of work from increasing competitive pressures, the development of technology and growing availability and use of data. The Academy's report *Count Us In* argues that the ability to understand and interpret data, developed notably through the study of the social sciences, is an essential feature of life in the 21st century: vital for the economy, for our society, and for us as individuals.⁷ It is important to understand that these skills are not solely developed by traditional STEM courses. The humanities and social sciences provide a rich context for the development of quantitative skills throughout the education journey.

Choice, access and competition in current and future systems

The impact of school reform on post-18 participation

14. Recent reforms to GCSEs and A levels may have adverse effects on post-18 participation. Student choices in post-18 study can be influenced by their experiences of subjects at post-16.⁸ Changes to the variety of what is studied may well impact on the uptake of subjects and the subsequent success of students post-18.

15. Analysis by Education Datalab of Level 3 qualifications in England has shown a narrowing of post-16 study, particularly in A level choices, where fewer students are taking 4 or more A levels, and are choosing a narrower range in the subjects they do select, meaning they are less likely to take subjects from across the spectrum of disciplines.⁹

⁴ British Academy (2013) Lost for Words: The Need for Languages in UK Diplomacy and Security <https://www.britac.ac.uk/publications/lost-words-need-languages-uk-diplomacy-and-security>

⁵ Foreman-Peck, J. & Yi Wang (2014), The Costs to the UK of Language Deficiencies as a Barrier to UK Engagement in Exporting: a Report to UK Trade and Investment https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/309899/Costs_to_UK_of_language_deficiencies_as_barrier_to_UK_engagement_in_exporting.pdf

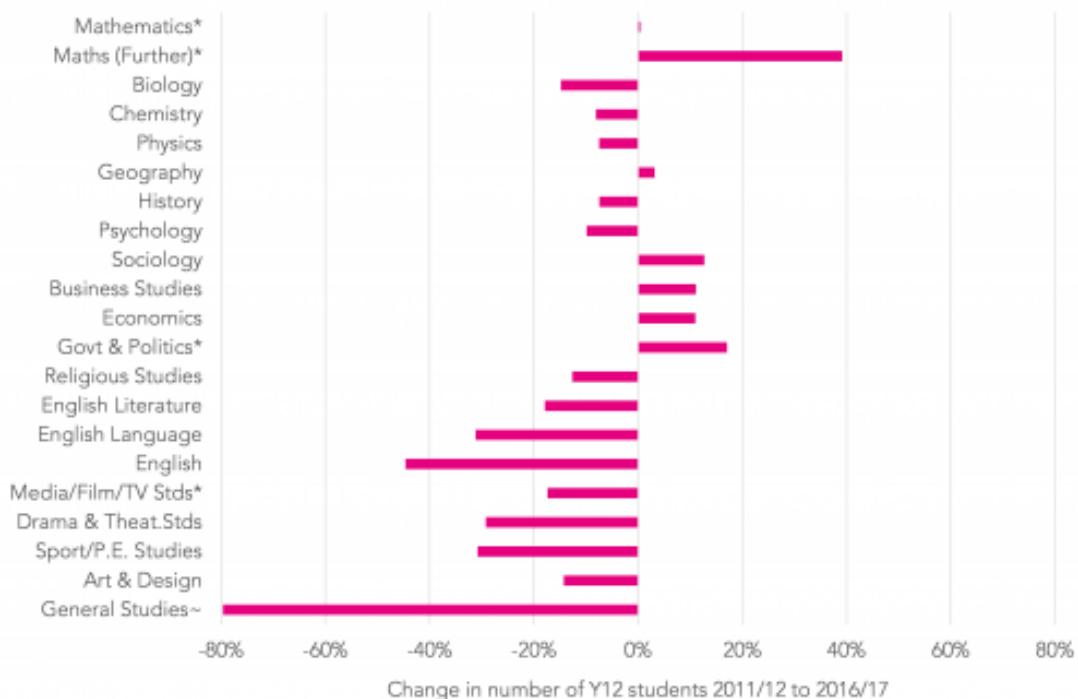
⁶ British Academy (2016), Born Global: a British Academy project on languages and employability <https://www.britac.ac.uk/born-global>

⁷ British Academy (2015), Count us in: Quantitative Skills for a New Generation <https://www.britac.ac.uk/publications/count-us-and-state-nation>

⁸ See, for example, Dilnot, C. (2017) 'The relationship between A-level subject choice and league table score of university attended', Centre for Longitudinal Studies <http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/shared/get-file.ashx?itemtype=document&id=3328>

⁹ Education Datalab (2017), Post-16 Qualification and Subject Mix- a Report for The Royal Society <https://royalsociety.org/~media/policy/topics/education-skills/Broadening%20the%20curriculum/education-datalab-report-post-16-qualifications-and-subject-mix-05-09-2017.pdf>

16. The move to a linear system of A levels, with examinations at the end of two years and the decoupling of the AS level, has disincentivised the uptake of a fourth A level, as students no longer have the option of discontinuing a subject after one year and claiming an AS level. With a greater number of A level students taking exclusively STEM subjects, this reduces the opportunities students have to experience arts, humanities and social science courses at A level, and particularly the uptake of a language.
17. Changes to 16-19 funding have created additional incentives on schools and colleges to discourage the uptake of a fourth A level and to scrap some subjects where demand is lower. A recent survey by the Association of Colleges showed that a high proportion of colleges were dropping the teaching of A levels in German, music, dance, and accounting.¹⁰
18. In addition, there has been a worrying fall in the number of students taking A levels in English and history, both seen as facilitating subjects for undergraduate study, as well as being vital to our understanding of the human world. Entries for A level English and history were down 5.6% and 6.8% respectively in 2017. We are also seeing a drop in the study of foreign languages both at GCSE and at A level. Continued decline in these subjects is likely to have a knock-on effect at post-18 both in terms of the study choices made by applicants and the breadth of their skillset when undertaking further study.



Source: Education Datalab¹¹

¹⁰ <https://www.tes.com/news/colleges-ditch-levels-amid-funding-pressure>

¹¹ <https://educationdatalab.org.uk/2017/05/young-people-are-taking-fewer-a-levels-as-qualification-reforms-kick-in-and-per-student-spending-falls/>

The ineffectiveness of educational quasi-markets

19. The scope and tone of the review and current Government policy suggests that a more dynamic market in price and provision is both desirable and achievable despite a body of evidence suggesting that quasi-markets in education have had limited success in improving student choice or raising educational standards.
20. The OECD conducted a comprehensive review of quasi-markets in education, which concluded that quasi-market reforms were mainly effective in developing innovations in marketing and management rather than innovations in teaching and learning.¹²
21. The report concluded that quasi-market reforms were based on 'over simplistic and optimistic view of market mechanisms' which failed to account for the complexity of how educational institutions would respond to market forces, including the tendency for standardisation and emulation over innovation and diversification. This tendency is increasingly apparent in the English higher education sector and is discussed in the next section.
22. The delivery of post-18 education requires considerable collaboration and partnership between institutions and colleges which are also in competition for students and funding. Ultimately, it is rational in a highly competitive, quasi-market-driven environment for institutions to maintain comparative advantage over their competitors by withholding resources, information, and good practice. However, this is likely to hinder and slow the development of better and more innovative provision and create a degree of exclusivity over particular courses and modes of provision, neither of which is ultimately in the interests of students or of UK economy and society.

The impact of perverse market incentives

23. The British Academy published *Measuring Success* on the use of league tables in public sector, providing a detailed evaluation of their use in education quasi-markets, including higher education. The report highlighted behaviours driven by league tables that have intensified since the introduction of £9,000 fees.¹³
24. The inclusion of facilities spending in university rankings, for instance, has created a logic of rewarding high spending without reference to the efficacy of such spending. In a similar vein, league tables and rankings have underpinned greater competition in advertising by universities, raising questions over the utility of increasing resources being used solely for marketing, rather than improving the student experience. This suggests that market competition is not providing good value for

¹² OECD (2009), Do Quasi-markets Foster Innovation in Education? A comparative perspective
https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/do-quasi-markets-foster-innovation-in-education_221583463325

¹³ British Academy (2012), Measuring Success: League Tables in the Public Sector
https://www.britac.ac.uk/sites/default/files/BRI1429_league_tables_report_03%2012_web.pdf

money, and the Academy believes that this issue should receive due attention as part of the review's evaluation of value for money.

25. The current post-2012 higher education funding system has failed to create greater diversity of higher education provision. The funding mechanisms in place favour full-time undergraduate provision and have led to changes on the supply side that have accelerated the decline in the numbers of part-time and mature students entering higher education. In the context of the delivery of an Industrial Strategy which requires a highly skilled, flexible, workforce, the Academy encourages the Government to explore how this decline can be addressed.
26. A future system should encourage and support alternative options that provide flexibility in mode and intensity of provision while embracing, where suitable, new technologies and pedagogies. This will require funding and regulatory reform to ensure not only that institutions can afford to innovate but also ensure that the system does not unfairly penalise risk-taking and experimentation by expecting new course designs to immediately meet the same benchmarks as other longstanding models. However, modes of provision such as accelerated degrees are not appropriate in all cases, particularly in AHSS, where students need time to develop a deep understanding of the interconnections within bodies of subject knowledge.
27. A new funding arrangement must also take into consideration the impact that changes to undergraduate fees and funding may have on postgraduate provision. The Academy supported the introduction of an income-contingent loan scheme for postgraduate courses and believes that postgraduate study must remain affordable and accessible in the future.¹⁴ However, the current maximum level of support may not provide students with the necessary cashflow to complete their course as rising fees for postgraduate taught courses now take up most (in some cases all) of the available finance.

Financial uncertainty in higher education

28. The Academy is concerned about the increasing complexity and uncertainty in higher education funding. Research published this year by *The Guardian* suggested that almost two-thirds of universities felt less optimistic about their financial prospects compared with 12 months ago.¹⁵
29. Many institutions will respond to financial uncertainty by being more cautious and conservative in their behaviour, and by focusing on short-term gains. More contingency provision is likely to be put aside to manage uncertainty of student numbers and fee levels, rather than invested in the current student experience.

¹⁴ See British Academy (2012), Postgraduate Funding: the neglected dimension

<https://www.britac.ac.uk/postgraduate-funding-neglected-dimension>

¹⁵ Moran, H. & Powell, J. (2018), Running a tight ship: can universities plot a course through rough seas?, Shift Learning

https://uploads.guim.co.uk/2018/01/30/Guardian_HSBC_UUK_Research_full_report_V4.pdf

According to *The Guardian* research, 37% of institutions indicated that they did not feel confident about taking riskier strategic initiatives compared with 12 months ago.

30. Any new funding arrangement for higher education should be designed to prevent high levels of financial uncertainty and deliver more stability for institutions to plan long-term investment strategies and take appropriate risks to innovate and deliver a more diverse offer to students.

The potential differentiation of tuition fees by subject

31. With consideration to the issues of market choice and competition discussed above, the Academy has substantial concerns over the Government's suggestion that undergraduate tuition fees could be differentiated by subject based on measures of quality, cost of provision, and graduate outcomes.

Varying fees by graduate earnings

32. The Academy is strongly opposed to the linking of fee levels to graduate earnings. There are three reasons for this.
 33. First, it is wrong to assume that the variance in graduate returns between subjects is explained solely, or even primarily, by the value to the economy of the knowledge and skills gained from the degree studied. Graduate returns are the product of a number of factors, their most obvious drivers being institutional reputation, location, gender, socio-economic background, government policy, and the performance of the economy.
 34. Second, past performance of graduates in the labour market is not a reliable indicator of future graduate performance. Even in more stable graduate labour markets such as medicine, salaries fluctuate considerably. The average starting salary of medicine graduates in graduate-level jobs in 2015 was 16% lower in real terms than it was in 2010. By contrast, the average starting salaries for building and construction graduates rose 21% in cash terms and 5% in real terms between 2010 and 2015.¹⁶ Even with an income-contingent repayment system in place, it seems unreasonable to lock students into higher or lower fees in view of the uncertainty of future returns.
 35. Third, and critically for the health of the UK, higher education provides wider social and economic benefits that would be prejudiced by a system of variable fees by subject. AHSS graduates enter an array of jobs of social importance but which do not attract high salaries, such as teaching, social work and jobs in the charity sector.¹⁷ Maintaining a strong flow of talent into such sectors is vital for the economy and society. Some institutions specialise in courses leading to opportunities in these areas and this should be encouraged and rewarded, rather than 'penalised'. Varying fees

¹⁶ <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/careers/what-do-graduates-do-and-earn/startng-salaries-%E2%80%93-do-graduates-earn-more/>

¹⁷ See [British Academy \(2017\), *The Right Skills*](#)

based on a narrow measure of individual economic returns risks undermining the wider role higher education plays in social and economic development.

Unintended consequences of variable fees

36. It is important to reiterate the earlier point that policies designed to stimulate market competition often fail to account for the complex behaviours of producers and consumers, leading to unintended adverse effects.
37. It is hard to predict how prospective students might respond to variable fees by subject, but there is evidence to suggest that degrees are seen as prestige goods and that price is used as a proxy for a degree's prestige.¹⁸ Therefore, courses with lower fees may be wrongly perceived as of lower quality or value, leading to a fall in demand. Equally, variable fees may encourage the study of subjects thought to have high returns, and institutions may expand provision of these to increase fee revenue. This could lead to oversupply of graduates in subjects such as economics and cause diminishing average returns on these degrees in the future.
38. There is considerable evidence that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and some minority ethnic backgrounds have greater debt aversion and price sensitivity. In a system where fees are varied by subject, this could deter groups of students with certain protected characteristics from studying subjects with high fees and create an added barrier to widening participation.¹⁹
39. Institutions may try to cover shortfalls in funding for courses with lower fees by increasing additional course costs, accommodation costs, and non-academic fees. In countries including Australia and Ireland, the charging of additional non-academic fees is common to pay for student services. If lower tuition fees are offset by

¹⁸ See Bowman NA and Bastedo MN (2009), "Getting on the Front Page: Organizational Reputation, Status Signals, and the Impact of U.S. News and World Report on Student Decisions", *Research in Higher Education*, 50 (5), 415-436

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.558.1347&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Thompson, J & Bekhradnia, B. (2014) The government's proposals for higher education funding and student finance – an analysis, HEPI <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/50-Government-HE-funding-proposals-summary.pdf>

Norton, A. & Cherastidham, I. (2015) University fees: what students pay in deregulated markets, Grattan Institute <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/830-University-Fees.pdf>

¹⁹ See UUK (2003), School leavers and further education students' attitudes to debt and their impact on participation in higher education

<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/attitudes-to-debt.aspx>

Callender, C. & Jackson, J. (2008) Does the fear of debt deter students from higher education?

[http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/21010/2/Does_the_fear_of_debt_deter_students_from_higher_education_\(LSERO\).pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/21010/2/Does_the_fear_of_debt_deter_students_from_higher_education_(LSERO).pdf)

NUS (2015), Debt in the first degree: Attitudes and behaviours of the first £9k fee paying graduates <https://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/12238/Debt%20In%20The%20First%20Degree%20-%20Graduates%20Survey%202015%20Report.pdf>

Paulsen, M.B. & St. John, E.B. (2002) Social Class and College Costs: Examining the Financial Nexus Between College Choice and Persistence, *Journal of Higher Education*, 73 (2), 189-236

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/14853>

additional up-front or pay-as-you-go costs, the system could end up being worse value for money and generate an additional cashflow problem for students.

40. We acknowledge that subjects do cost different amounts to teach, but there is not a straightforward distinction between AHSS and STEM. For example, subjects such as languages, archaeology, and the performing and creative arts require specialist facilities in the same way as laboratory-based subjects. Moreover, in the growing areas of interdisciplinary provision, AHSS and STEM staff come together to jointly provide courses, and this makes attempts to apportion cost of delivery to subjects highly problematic. The cost of provision is also determined by teaching and pedagogical approaches, and there are common overheads and shared resources, the costs of which will fluctuate and cannot be easily apportioned to subjects. Institutions need to be able to manage their budgets in a way that enables them to invest for the future and ensure sustainable provision in subjects which meet national needs, not to be reliant on market demand, which is inevitably focused on the short term.
41. A fees system that underfunds certain disciplines, potentially those in the arts and humanities, will damage UK higher education's international reputation, because it will be harder for universities to run the world-leading courses for which the UK is renowned. There will be a knock-on impact on research excellence in subjects where there is insufficient funding to maintain the size of some departments and hence support existing researchers and research infrastructure, and to train the researchers of the future. As Olive (2017) has demonstrated, research in UK universities is cross-subsidised, in part, by revenue from (mainly international student) tuition fees, and this cross-subsidy is necessary for maintaining and building the long-term intellectual infrastructure that supports both continuing research excellence and high-quality teaching.²⁰
42. The funding system must ensure that there is sufficient resource for all disciplines so that they can continue to thrive and deliver world-class teaching and research. The British Academy believes that cross-subsidy within an HE provider is essential for sensible management of a long-term strategy for innovation in universities and for the health of disciplines.
43. Overall, the Academy is extremely concerned that if AHSS subjects come to be offered at lower fee levels, this will misleadingly play down the value of AHSS and may create the perception that such courses are of low quality. The risks and impracticalities of implementing a subject-level variable fees system vastly outweigh any potential benefits.

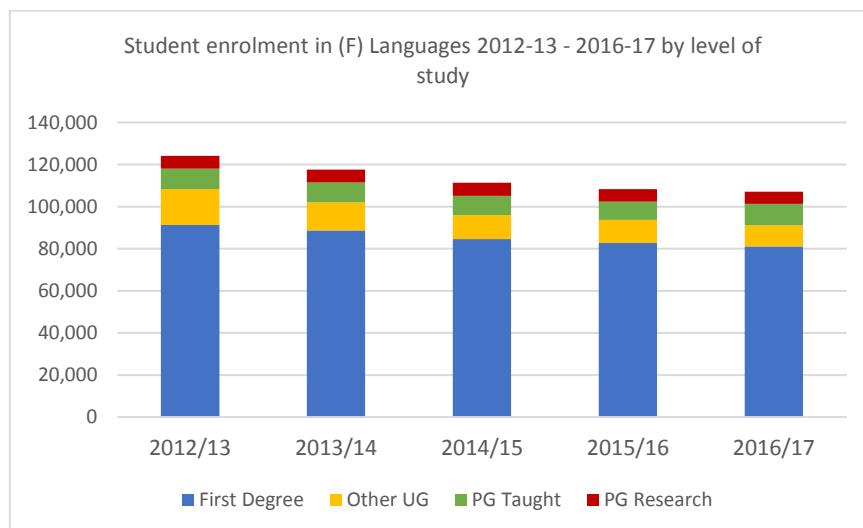
²⁰ Olive, V. (2017) How much is too much? Cross-subsidies from teaching to research in British universities, HEPI Report 100 <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/HEPI-How-much-is-too-much-Report-100-FINAL.pdf>

The safeguarding of strategically important subjects and diverse provision

44. The Academy is examining the landscape of provision in HSS disciplines and how changes to funding and student finance may impact on subject areas of strategic importance which meet national needs, such as languages, and in which the UK has a reputation for excellence. Further British Academy research is likely to include deeper qualitative and quantitative analysis of the drivers of declining student and staff numbers in particular subjects and whether there are regional disparities in choice and diversity of AHSS subject provision.

Language degrees

45. Enrolment in language degrees has been in decline for several years, and particularly from 2012-13 onwards. Between 2012-13 and 2016-17, the overall number of students on undergraduate or postgraduate courses in languages fell by 13.8%. Some of the largest declines are in modern European languages like French, German, Italian and Spanish. English studies, the largest subject in the languages field, has seen a 19.1% decline, which is around 12,000 fewer students in 2016-17 compared with 2010-11. These trends are summarised in the graphic below.



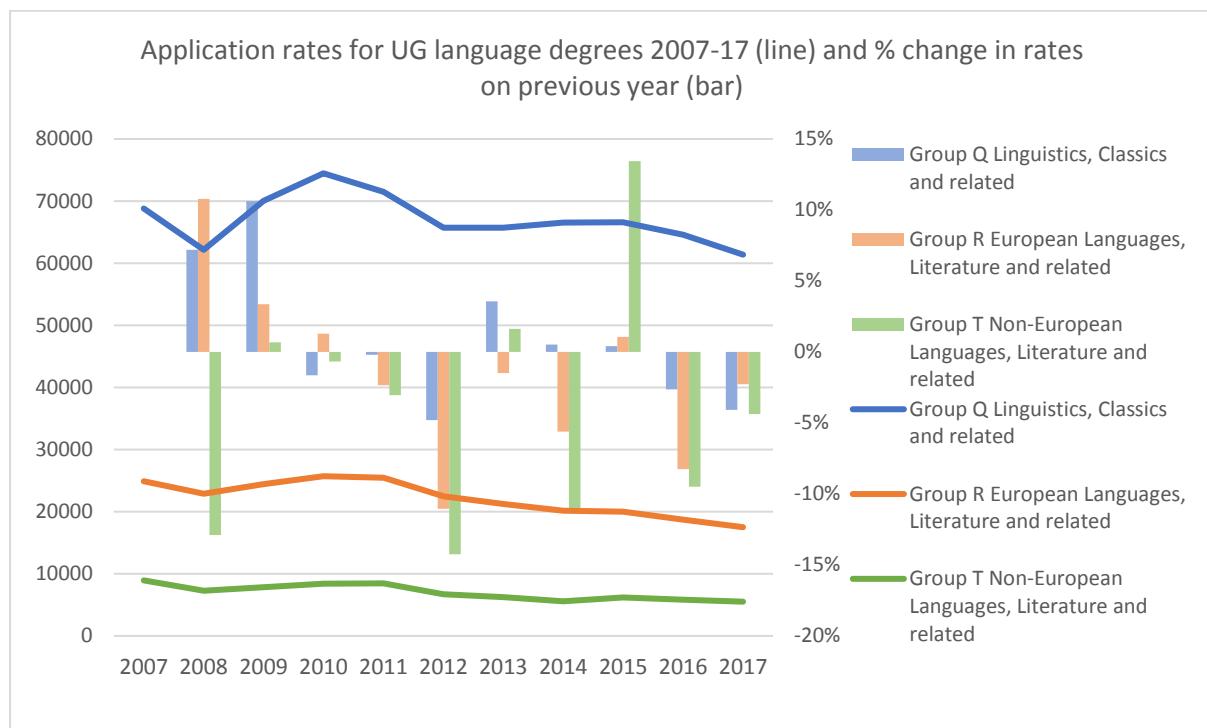
Source: HESA student enrolment data, available at www.hesa.ac.uk (CC BY 4.0)

Selection of larger subjects in (F) Languages subject area	2010-11	2016-17	Difference	% change
(Q1) Linguistics	5525	6,360	835	15.1%
(Q3) English studies	63245	51,190	-12,055	-19.1%
(Q8) Classical studies	5205	5,900	695	13.4%
(R1) French studies	11300	6,215	-5,085	-45.0%
(R2) German studies	4340	2,490	-1,850	-42.6%
(R3) Italian studies	2960	1,110	-1,850	-62.5%
(R4) Spanish studies	8875	5,600	-3,275	-36.9%
(T1) Chinese studies	1870	1,420	-450	-24.1%
(T2) Japanese studies	1540	1,240	-300	-19.5%

(T6) Modern Middle Eastern studies	1810	1,225	-585	-32.3%
(T7) American studies	3060	2,285	-775	-25.3%

Source: HESA student enrolment data, available at www.hesa.ac.uk (CC BY 4.0)

46. UCAS data on application rates to language courses, represented in the following graphic, suggest that declining enrolment could be related to falling demand for the subjects and that this could well be linked to the introduction of higher fees. After a drop in applications around 2012, the year that £9,000 tuition fees were introduced, applications failed to pick up in subsequent years. The declines in applications in Group Q (Linguistics, Classics & related) and Group R (European Languages, Literature and related) appear to have accelerated in the past two years, and for the overall good of the UK they should be monitored closely.²¹



Source: UCAS End of Cycle Report 2017

Course and department closures

47. While information about department (subject) closures is patchy, it is clear that the current funding regime creates pressures on institutions to narrow their provision. There is not sufficient support or incentives for institutions to maintain a longer-term strategy for subject diversity and continue to deliver subjects that may prove less financially stable in the short term. Moreover, there is currently no national monitoring of departmental or course closures, nor does current funding and

²¹ UCAS (2017) End of Cycle Report for 2017 <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/ucas-undergraduate-analysis-reports/2017-end-cycle-report>

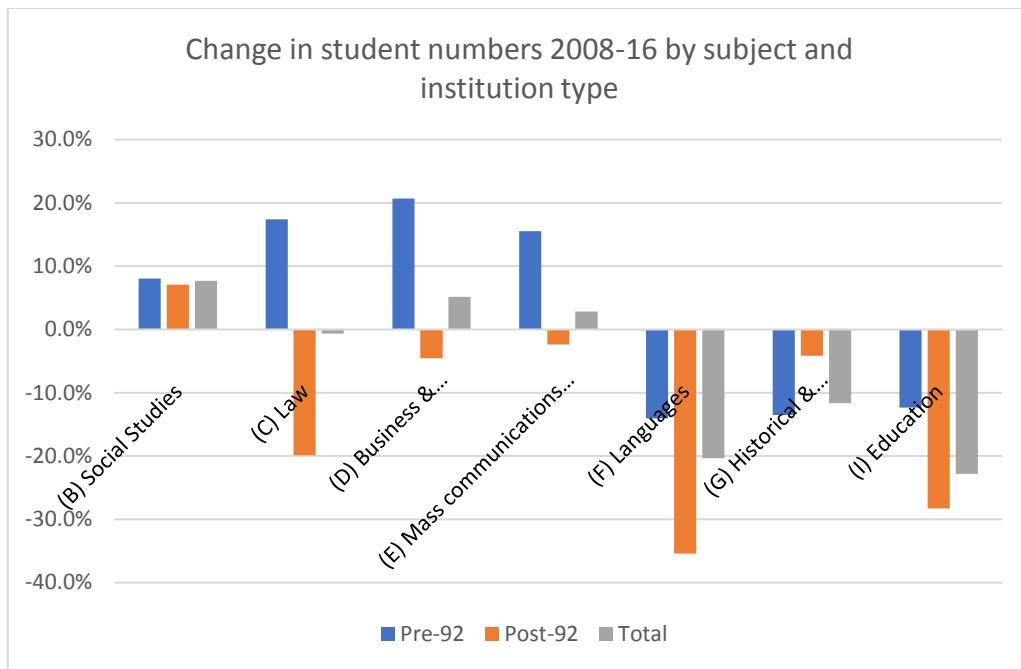
regulatory architecture play a sufficient role in assessing the impact of closures or in intervening to prevent damage to the health and diversity of provision.

48. In AHSS, the most common departmental closures appear to be in modern languages. Between 2007 and 2017 at least 10 modern language departments were closed at UK higher education institutions and at least a further nine significantly downsized their undergraduate provision.
49. Several theology and religious studies departments have also closed, downsized or merged at higher education institutions during this period, and Heythrop College, a specialist provider in this subject area, is due to close at the end of the 2017-18 academic year.

Access to humanities and social sciences subjects in different institution types

50. The Academy is concerned that the current fees and funding regime is failing to provide sufficient variety in the type of institution and course for students wishing to study subjects in the humanities and social sciences.
51. According to HESA student enrolment data, pre-92 institutions saw just over a 1% (7,200) fall in HSS students overall compared with a 10% (51,440) fall in post-92 institutions between 2012-13 and 2015-16. In 2015-16, pre-92 institutions had 2.3% more students in HSS than they did in 2007-8 whereas post-92s had 12.2% fewer.²²
52. The graphic below indicates the scale of decline in the number of less selective institutions offering law and modern languages. Provision of law courses has seen significant decline in post-92 institutions while it has seen growth in pre-92s. Other HSS subjects may also be threatened in post-92s in the future if recruitment in pre-92s continues to expand.

²² "Post-92" refers to institutions that were given university status in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, many of which were former polytechnics. "Pre-92" refers to any institution which received its Royal Charter prior to the 1992 Act.



Source: HESA student enrolment data, available at www.hesa.ac.uk (CC BY 4.0)

53. It is important that any changes to the funding of higher education seek to ensure that there is sufficient access to humanities and social sciences degrees across different institution types and different regions of the country. Without such diversity, the value of AHSS skills to the economy and society is not being most effectively enhanced and some people will be denied opportunities. Geographical and institutional ‘cold spots’ in subject provision will prejudice improving social mobility and participation.

Ensuring the continued health of the disciplines

54. The funding and regulatory regime in higher education should, as a matter of urgency, address the sustainability of subject diversity by safeguarding strategically important but vulnerable subjects and ensuring that the sector continues to offer a broad choice of subjects across a diverse range of providers. Strategic decisions about subject provision to meet national need should not be determined solely by market demand and student choice.
55. There is a need to develop a model in which market competition does not preclude healthy collaboration and partnerships between institutions and other organisations to support, innovate, and overall enhance the available provision, and which enables institutions to plan for the long term.
56. There also needs to be a mechanism to monitor and then ensure that the individual decisions taken by universities to close or shrink academic departments in response to changing student demand or other market uncertainties do not collectively damage the provision of disciplines that it is in the national interest to maintain.
57. With the creation of UK Research and Innovation and the Office for Students separating some of the responsibilities previously administered within the Higher

Education Funding Council for England, the need for proper oversight of the health of disciplines across both teaching and research becomes ever more critical, to ensure a strategic overview of the needs of the knowledge base is maintained. This is a role which the national academies would be well placed to undertake, subject to appropriate resourcing. The British Academy stands ready to explore these potential observatory and curatorial roles further with Government and to bring in our sister academies.