

Higher Education and Research Bill: questions and actions

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Higher Education and Research Bill

- NOT a consultation
- Draft Bill, which means main forum for change will be parliamentary amendment
- TEF elements are a consultation, which we will also take up

AcSS coverage:

- Recognise many concerns over coverage:
 - *University autonomy*
 - *New entrants*
 - *Inspection*
 - *Etc.*
- Many of these issues will be led on by others.
- AcSS will concentrate on research provisions and possible effects on social science. This presentation contains our initial thoughts.
- TEF consultation will follow

Recognise some positive elements, especially in White Paper:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/523546/bis-16-265-success-as-a-knowledge-economy-web.pdf

- WP support for dual support, Haldane
- WP commitment in principle to strong and autonomous leadership of research committees
- Multi-disciplinary research

Concerns identified so far: I

- **Haldane principle and dual support** not mentioned in Bill.
- Not just an issue of decisions over individual grant but aimed at ensuring ‘core funds’ (now to be distributed by Research England) distinct from funds provided by Research Councils who, with universities, “should choose which research to support on scientific criteria, at ‘arms’ length’ from political considerations.” (POST).
- **ACTION:** amendment to Bill, enshrining dual support and role of Research Committees and universities in choosing areas of research to support

Concerns identified so far: II

- **Strategic planning process** in Bill (Linked to Haldane)
- Bill mentions roles of UKRI and Secretary of State in setting out strategic plans, but no statutory duty to consult Research Committees and their constituent research communities.
- While BIS has always had a role, the current drafting is top-down and one way.
- **ACTION:** amendment to Bill, enshrining duty of UKRI to consult with Research Committees and research communities before strategic plans are put forward.

Concerns identified so far: III

- **Remit of UKRI and Research Committees in Bill**
- Bill mentions “(a) contributing to economic growth in the United Kingdom and (b) improving quality of life (whether in the United Kingdom or elsewhere)” (PP. 87, Sec. 4).
- Some concern over narrowness of interpretation possible (for basic research, ‘understanding’)
- **ACTION:** amendment to Bill, suggesting ‘public benefit’ remit, consonant with Data Sharing Bill draft, and wider definition

Concerns identified so far: IV

- **Definition of ‘science’** in Bill
- Paragraph 102 of the Bill (‘Definitions’) says “‘science’ includes social science’. Elsewhere language of Bill focuses on ‘research into science, technology, humanities and new ideas’ (Part I, PP 85, 99, and Sch.9, PP 2).
- Formulation throughout the Bill should reflect all relevant fields.
- **ACTION:** amendment to Bill, including term ‘social science’ in PP 85, 89, and where relevant.

Concerns identified so far: V

- **Representation of social sciences (and Research Committees) in UKRI**
- Nurse proposed that ‘Executive Chairs’ (formerly CEOs of Research Councils) should be on UKRI Board. This would ensure disciplinary and academic representation, which is left in Bill to Secretary of State
- **ACTION:** amendment to Bill, to require Secretary of State be mindful of representing disciplines in appointing members of the UKRI Board and that Executive Chairs of the Research Committees will be *ex officio* members of the UKRI Board

Concerns identified so far: VI

- **Change in Royal Charter status and security of Research Committees**
- Currently Research Councils have Royal Charter status which offers statutory protection when changed.
- Bill gives SoS rights to change name or remit of Research Committees through ‘statutory instrument’, requiring vote but not debate in Parliament or consultation. (Unlike Research England or Innovate UK)
- **ACTION:** amendment to Bill, to require Secretary of State change name or remit of Research Committees only after public consultation and Parliamentary debate (as with RE and Innovate UK)

Other issues:

- **Global Challenges Fund**

- Not mentioned in Bill of course, but work to ensure social sciences have formative influence, not just afterthought

- **TEF**

- This is formal consultation. Will develop note and consult later this month.
- Again, focus on social science issues

Timetable:

- Currently unclear, though very fast.
- Announcement on HoC Second Reading on June 9th. (First reading was 19th May).
- Speculation that the government wants the Bill approved before the end of the year, but as UKRI will be being set up throughout this period, we should assume that there will be pressure on the Lords to act quickly as well.
- See <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2016-17/highereducationandresearch.html> for updates

Actions:

- Since not a consultation (except TEF), change only possible through amendments in Commons or Lords.
- We need to mobilise discussions with members of HoC and HoLs, including especially on Science and Technology Committees.
- **This will mean we need to work together to circulate lists and action points, as Learned Societies will have great strengths**

Next steps:

- **YOUR thoughts on issues, concerns?**
- **Shared action on parliamentary contacts?**