

Office for Students - Consultation on recurrent funding 2021-22

06 May 2021

The British Academy has responded to a [consultation](#) by the Office for Students on the approach to recurrent funding for 2021-22 in light of the government's statutory guidance letter setting out the funds available for the financial year 2021-22 and the related funding policies and priorities that it wishes us to implement.

The deadline for responses was 6 May 2021.

Question 1: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to distribute a greater proportion of OfS recurrent grant through the main high-cost subject funding method? (See paragraphs 15 to 36)

Strongly disagree

The British Academy notes the challenge the Office for Student faces of balancing its funding settlement from government with a significant increase in student numbers, and agrees with the importance of supporting activities which widen access and enable student success and supporting the distinctive role of specialist providers. The Academy however has serious concerns about the proposals for distribution of funding within the high-cost subject funding method based on perceived strategic value or importance of different disciplines.

As has been evidenced by our reports on [Shaping the COVID Decade](#), produced at the request of Sir Patrick Vallance, the success of our long-term recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will depend on more than just medicine, science and technological innovation and requires the combined weight of the social cultural, political, economic, and historical perspectives of the full range of disciplines. This includes those subjects that would see a steep reduction in funding under these proposals. These subjects connect higher education institutions with museums and other cultural and heritage organisations and so with ordinary taxpayers and what they enjoy. Creative industries are also closely connected to popular demand through avenues such as gaming and esports.

Creative and digital excellence also lies at the heart of immersive technologies which are as important to digital health and inclusive productivity as they are to the cultural sector. This includes unicorn companies such as Gymshark, one of only 18 such companies in the UK, which produces clothes but whose essence and success is both digital and creative.

We encourage a reconsideration of the distribution of funding to recognise the value of a full range of subjects and skills vital to a thriving economy and environment, vibrant culture and cohesive society, including those gained particularly through the pursuit of SHAPE subjects (Social Sciences, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy), as demonstrated in a range of previous work by the Academy on the range of [skills these subjects develop](#) and the [demand for them both now and in the future](#).

Question 2: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to split price group C1 in order to implement a reduction of 50 per cent to the high-cost subject funding allocated to subjects in the performing arts; creative arts; media studies and archaeology? (See paragraphs 15 to 26)

Strongly disagree

The performing and creative arts, media studies and archaeology are all vital to the knowledge and skills base on which the UK's 80% service sector economy depends. The creative economy is one of the most dynamic, productive and profitable sectors of the UK labour market. Since 2014, the sector has grown at almost twice the rate of the UK economy, generating around £10m per hour. These industries are now worth £84.1 billion to the UK economy. The heritage sector, of which the insights of archaeologists are a central part, is central to the UK's appeal as a tourist destination, which will be crucial in reopening our borders and rebuilding the economy as the COVID-19 pandemic is brought under control. Moreover, the government ambitions for major investments in physical infrastructure as a central pillar of its levelling-up agenda will rely on having a well-trained practical archaeology workforce who can carry out the necessary investigations required by law before building work can begin. The proposed funding cuts for these subjects will put the quality of provision in these areas at risk, as it will no longer be financially viable for providers to offer opportunities using innovative, up to date pedagogical approaches.

The Academy acknowledges that subjects cost different amounts to teach, but there is not a straightforward distinction between STEM and SHAPE subjects in terms of the costs of provision. Increasingly, the challenges the world faces, and which higher education providers are preparing for their students to tackle, require interdisciplinary approaches, and this makes attempts to apportion apparent costs of delivery to subjects highly problematic. These proposals may also result in reduced opportunities for students to widen their learning through such interdisciplinary study.

The Academy is also concerned that the proposed reductions to funding would impact subjects which make a significant contribution to access and participation, particularly for students with disabilities and from the most deprived sections of society. [The COVID-19 pandemic](#) has highlighted and exacerbated inequalities that exist across society and young people will likely bear the brunt of the longer-term socio-economic and wellbeing impacts. Reducing funding to subjects in the performing arts, creative arts, media studies and archaeology will therefore reduce the wider benefits to culture and society that graduates in these subjects bring, but also risks exacerbating inequalities and the barriers that exist for some of our most vulnerable young people.

Question 3: Notwithstanding your answer to question 2, if we were to split pricing group C1 s proposed, to what extent do you agree with our approach to implementing this?

Strongly disagree

Question 4: To what extent do you agree with our approach to counting students from the Crown Dependencies in our funding allocations for 2021-22? (See paragraphs 34 and 35)

Don't know/prefer not to say

Question 5: To what extent do you agree with the proposed approach to remove the targeted allocation for students attending courses in London? (See paragraphs 37 to 48)

Tend to disagree

The Academy has concerns about the proposal to remove the targeted allocation for students attending courses in London. There are many centres of excellence in SHAPE disciplines whose quality and range of provision would be put at risk by the proposed cut. Many London institutions also afford important access and participation routes to SHAPE disciplines for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and these opportunities may be put at risk under the current proposals, particularly where the proposed removal of the targeted allocation for London coincides with other proposals to split price group C1 and the resultant reduction to funding for subjects in the performing arts; creative arts; media studies and archaeology.

Question 6: To what extent do you agree with the proposed approach to remove the London weighting from the formula-based student premium allocations?

Tend to disagree

Question 7: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to provide £40 million to support Uni Connect activities in 2021-22? (See paragraphs 59 to 63)

Don't know/prefer not to say

Question 8: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to distribute an additional £5 million through the existing student premiums in the proportions

shown in paragraph 65, and to earmark this £5 million to be spent on student hardship?

Don't know/prefer not to say

Question 9: to what extent do you agree with the proposals to distribute £15 million to address student transition and mental health, through a combination of competition and a new formula-based student premium? (See paragraphs 67-71)

Don't know/prefer not to say

Question 10: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to maintain in cash terms the rate of funding for the nursing, midwifery and allied health supplement, which will increase the total budget to £27 million? (See paragraphs 74 to 75)

Don't know/prefer not to say

Question 11: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to maintain in cash terms the rate of funding for overseas study programmes, but base the allocation on the higher of relevant student numbers in either 2019-20 or 2020-21? (See paragraphs 76 to 78)

Tend to agree

We support the proposal to determine the allocation for overseas study programmes based on the higher student numbers of either 2019-20 or 2020-21, which recognises the unique circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the Academy notes that the new Turing scheme is as yet unproven, and the costs involved in supporting students to take part in opportunities through it are as yet unknown, as it will lack much of the well-established infrastructure which had been built up in association with the Erasmus+ programme. The need to establish new partnership arrangements and ensure that opportunities are appropriate for students, and the lack of funding for reciprocal arrangements within the Turing scheme, may lead to increased costs for providers. The Academy encourages OfS to monitor this closely, and take steps to address this should this become a factor in reducing take up of the new scheme, which is critically needed to deliver the government's objectives for a global Britain.

Question 12: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to maintain in cash terms the budgets for other targeted allocation as proposed in paragraph 79?

Tend to agree

Question 13: Do you have any comments about any unintended consequences of these proposals, for example, for particular types of provider or for particular types of student?

Over the course of the last 12 months, we have already seen a stream of announcements from institutions about plans to close, downsize or restructure departments in SHAPE disciplines. As well as the impact to staff and students, the proposals to drastically cut funding to certain subjects and to remove the targeted allocation to students studying in London may exacerbate these changes and result in geographical and disciplinary ‘cold spots’ of provision, where it may no longer be possible to study certain subjects. As demonstrated by our work on [language education in the UK](#), once this provision is gone, it is very hard to re-establish.

Where these reductions may result in closures, there could be major impacts on the opportunities for students from particular backgrounds to study these subjects. The performing arts; creative arts; media studies and archaeology, play a notable role in widening participation and access, particularly for those with a reported disability and from POLAR 1 and 2 quadrants, something which the consultation itself acknowledges. These students typically have less flexibility to travel to another institution outside of their own area, and could therefore have reduced choice of provider or subject if provision is lost as a result of the proposed cuts.

Question 14: Do you have any comments about the potential impact of these proposals on individuals on the basis of their protected characteristics?

The consultation itself notes that students studying design, and creative and performing arts, as well as those studying media, journalism and communications, have the highest proportion in any broad subject group to have a reported disability, including cognitive or learning disabilities and mental health conditions. The consultation also notes the significantly higher proportion of students from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds who study at institutions in London. HESA data also shows that SHAPE subjects in general attract a higher proportion of female and non-binary students, and of mature students than STEM. As a result, there is potential for students and potential future students from all of these groups to be particularly negatively impacted by the current proposals.

The Academy recognises the challenges for access and participation and equality of opportunity that exist across the UK, but we do not believe that disadvantaging those subjects which make an important contribution to the economy, culture and society of the UK, as well as offering opportunities to students from disadvantaged backgrounds or with different protected characteristics, in favour of a narrower set of perceived ‘strategic’ subjects is an appropriate way to address this.

Question 15: To what extent do you agree with the proposed changes to terms and conditions of grant for 2021-22? (See paragraph 97)

Tend to agree

Question 16: Do you have any other comments on the proposals in this document?