

President's Notes

Nicholas Stern introduces the British Academy's new 'Strategic Framework'



Lord Stern of Brentford is IG Patel Professor of Economics and Government at the London School of Economics, and President of the British Academy.

People have mixed views about 'mission statements'. Some seem a pedestrian statement of the obvious, others merely trot out the jargon of management-consultancy-speak, while the worst, to quote Macbeth, come across as 'a tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'.

I hope that in drawing up our Strategic Framework for the next four years the British Academy has avoided these bear traps. Any publicly funded body needs to be clear about the rationale for its existence, to provide a sense of purpose and vision, and to have a clear sense of its priorities and objectives in order to justify receiving the support of taxpayers.

The aim of our Strategic Framework is therefore to spell out our overriding purpose for all the communities with which we interact – our thousands of grant applicants, the wider academic community whose interests we seek to serve, our 1,300 UK and international Fellows, the curious and the thoughtful in general, the policy-making community with whom we share research findings and evidence, our stakeholders and funders, and not least our own staff. To meet that objective, it is essential that our purposes and intentions are communicated in clear, concise and realistic language.

We have described the British Academy's purpose as being:

- 'to inspire and support high achievement in the humanities and social sciences throughout the UK and internationally, and to promote their public value'.

We think this distils our mission as clearly and unambiguously as possible. It captures both the intrinsic value of research in our disciplines as vital sources of human knowledge and insight, and the contributions they make to the economy, to cultural enrichment and an educated citizenry. In short, how the humanities and social sciences can both deepen understanding and help change our world for the better.

Over the past few years the British Academy has built on its scholarly strengths while developing its public role. Looking ahead, we have therefore defined the Academy as having three principal roles. These are:

- **A Fellowship** of distinguished scholars from all areas of the humanities and social sciences, elected by their peers, that facilitates the exchange of knowledge and ideas and promotes the work of our subjects.
- **A Funding Body** that supports the best ideas, individuals and intellectual resources in the humanities and social sciences, nationally and internationally.



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- **A Forum** for debate and engagement that stimulates public interest and deepens understanding, that enhances global leadership and policy making, and that acts as a voice for the humanities and social sciences.

Spanning all three of these roles are three core values that lie at the heart of the British Academy's work: excellence, independence and diversity:

- **Excellence:** We are committed to the highest standards across all the Academy's activities, from recognising and supporting outstanding research, especially by early career scholars, to our engagement with policy development and public discussion.
- **Independence:** We seek, in all our activities, to safeguard scholarly interests and academic freedom, independent of government and of individual university or other particular interests.
- **Diversity:** We are committed to promoting and encouraging greater diversity in those we fund, elect to our Fellowship, and work and partner with, reflecting the excellence of the research community, wherever it is found.

Having defined our three principal roles and our three overarching values, the Framework then sets out our four strategic priorities that will shape our work for the next four years (2016–2020):

- **Championing the Humanities and Social Sciences**
To promote our disciplines, uphold their value and importance and stimulate public interest in them.
- **Advancing Excellent Research**
To create funding opportunities for outstanding people and innovative research across the humanities and social sciences, and to recognise and celebrate high achievement.
- **Shaping Policy and Public Understanding**
To enhance understanding of the contribution of humanities and social science research to public life and debate, and their role in the process of making public policy.
- **Delivering Global Leadership in Research**
To develop UK research in international arenas and provide leadership that helps shape the research agenda on global challenges, and strengthen understanding of other cultures and societies.

As President, I think that this Framework does provide a succinct and powerful summary of why the Academy exists and what we will do over the four years of the current funding period. Or to quote again words attributed to Shakespeare: 'See first that the design is wise and just; that ascertained, pursue it resolutely.'

