

‘Report from the Science and Technology Committee ‘Science research funding in Universities’

Briefing for Grand Committee Debate, 9th September 2020

Overview

- The Science and Technology Committee’s report sets out a clear pathway for the Government to support and protect the world-leading research being undertaken in UK universities. It is imperative that future investment to support research and development in universities **fully takes into account the vital role of social science research, alongside STEM disciplines, and funds it accordingly.**
- Social sciences education and research provide critical foundations to our understanding of how societies and economies can adapt to changes. Social sciences are, and will continue to be, crucial to guiding the UK’s short-term and long-term response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- LSE research has highlighted how women, BAME communities and the self-employed have been impacted by COVID-19, and influenced UK Government thinking to better understand the challenges facing vulnerable groups during and after the crisis.

Introduction

- The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) is a world-leading university, which has been pioneering social science research for 125 years to challenge existing ways of thinking.
- LSE ranks first in Europe and second in the world for social sciences and management in the QS subject rankings 2020, and recently became the eighth full member of CIVICA - the European University of Social Sciences – ensuring ongoing international collaboration.
- The social sciences are academic disciplines dedicated to the study of society, the economy, business, governance, history and culture. A report from London Economics found that they account for over two fifths of the students in the UK’s university sector, and LSE research shows there is a similar proportion for academic staff.

Recommendations of the Committee – LSE Response

- The Committee’s report notes the importance to universities of being able to fund the full economic cost of research, and the vital role Quality Related (QR) funding plays in this. This is every bit as important for the social science research as it is for STEM. The report notes that QR funding has fallen 12.8% in real terms since 2010. Any decrease in funding adds pressure on the ability of universities to conduct high-quality scientific research into the social sciences, and **Government should commit to ongoing and increased QR funding as part of the current Spending Review process.**
- The report notes the importance of "retaining the mobility of researchers after Brexit" to ensure that the UK attracts world leading talent. This will be crucial if the Government is to achieve its welcome R&D ambitions and ensure the UK maintains a lead in the industries of the future.
- 80% of LSE’s Horizon 2020 and FP7 (7th Framework) funding has been through the European Research Council and Marie-Sklodowska-Curie Actions, which has allowed for the recruitment and retention of outstanding social science talent to the UK. Association has supported important LSE research, including into the allocation of new health technologies and effective economic policies during disasters, and social science disciplines are vulnerable to the loss of these incentives, and to the loss of global talent. **Both the UK Government and the EU must prioritise the UK’s ongoing association to Horizon, which will benefit institutions, students, and research across the EU.**

SHAPE (Social Sciences, humanities and the arts for people and the economy)

- Alongside the British Academy, LSE has led in the formulation of the SHAPE campaign, developed to encourage schoolchildren and undergraduates to choose to study arts, humanities and social science subjects as part of positive steps towards a high-status career, and to demonstrate the huge positive impact these disciplines have on the UK's, and the world's, economies and societies.
- A report from Deloitte on 'The Value of the Humanities' showed that degrees in SHAPE subjects involve many technical skills including quantitative analysis skills, policy development, software use and foreign language skills, as well as high levels of transferrable skills, such as problem-solving, innovation and communication which are highly valued by employers.
- Research from London Economics recently found that eight out of the ten fastest growing sectors in the UK economy are employing more graduates from humanities and social sciences than any other disciplines, and they will be essential to fill in the workforce gaps of the future and to underpin people's abilities to change jobs and careers.
- Research and study in SHAPE subjects should not be seen in opposition to STEM subjects but as valuable expertise and societal insight that will be vital for the UK to develop, alongside research from STEM subjects, to tackle the effect of COVID-19 and the most pressing global concerns.

LSE Social Science Case Studies

- LSE academics have been undertaking data-led research into the impacts of COVID-19 and the lockdown on vulnerable members of society. This evidence continues to be of key importance to policy-making as the pandemic continues, and will help underpin effectively targeted interventions.

The impact of COVID-19 on women

- LSE academic Dr Clare Wenham conducted a research study with women most at risk of COVID-19. Nearly all of the women interviewed mentioned **anxiety or mental health concerns** with drivers ranging from employment and personal finance to child wellbeing and home schooling.
- Many women noted that their domestic load had increased and was spread unevenly, even where their spouse was furloughed.
- The women did not feel that they have had a voice in decision-making in the outbreak, nor did they feel their perspectives, needs or the differential gender impact of lockdown had been recognised by policymakers. Many felt the lack of visibility of women in official responses contributed to this.

The impact of COVID-19 on BAME communities

- Research conducted by Professor Lucinda Platt, at LSE's Department of Social Policy, **found that ethnic groups were more vulnerable to the health and economic effects** of COVID-19 than other groups.
- Per-capita COVID-19 hospital deaths are highest among the black Caribbean population and three times those of the white British majority.
- The research found that many ethnic minorities are more economically vulnerable to the crisis than white ethnic groups since they are more likely to work in shut-down sectors, such as the restaurant sector and as taxi-drivers.

The impact of COVID-19 on the self-employed

- Analysis from Professor Stephen Machin and Jack Blundell at LSE's Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) found that the self-employed - including delivery drivers, builders and hairdressers - have been particularly heavily hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The research found that more than a third of those surveyed (34%) say they have had trouble paying basic expenses such as rent mortgage payments or essentials in the previous month and more than 60% of workers earned less than £1,000 in April.
- Many self-employed people were unclear what official support they are entitled to - indicating that **additional effort may be needed to communicate to those who can access government schemes.**

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