

Rt Hon. Gillian Keegan MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education in England
Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street
London, SW1P 3BT
Correspondence Team.PO@education.gov.uk

18 March 2024

Dear Secretary of State

Proposals for an Advanced English Standard

I write further to the Academy of Social Sciences' recent response to the DfEE [consultation](#) on the proposed Advanced English Standard. While we have used the formal consultation mechanism to set out our thoughts on matters of detail in the proposals, we also wanted to outline our position on the [principle](#) of the policy and to request a meeting with you and your officials to discuss these in more detail.

By way of background, the Academy of Social Sciences exists to promote social sciences in the UK for public benefit. We are a national academy and the UK professional body for academics, practitioners and learned societies in the social sciences. Our work is informed and supported by 1,600 leading social scientist Fellows together with 48 member Learned Societies that cover the main disciplines and sub-disciplines in the social science sector. This gives us a reach of some 90,000 social scientists in the UK.

The social sciences are the study of contemporary societies, economies, people and places. They are distinct from both the humanities and arts sector (which includes English, history, religious studies, and music for example) and from the maths, physical and biological sciences (STEM) sector. The social science disciplines include: business & management, economics, geography, politics & international studies, psychology (social & behavioural), and sociology, all of which currently rank in the top 12 subject choices at A-level (and geography is the anchor social science in the English Baccalaureate). The social sciences also include anthropology, architecture & planning, criminology, development studies, education, law, regional studies, social work and social policy, social aspects of healthcare, and tourism and leisure studies, which by and large do not figure in school curricula.

Our concerns, and those of [our member Learned Societies](#), fall into two categories.

1. **The proposals, in their current form, are unrealistic for logistical reasons** – not least because the resource implications for schools and colleges are impractical.
2. **The proposals do not reflect (a) the contribution the social sciences make to a broad and balanced education, (b) the popularity of the social sciences amongst pupils, or (c) their importance for wider society and employability.**

We believe that the next iteration of proposals needs to reflect more fully a balanced curriculum in which students gain a sound understanding of the contemporary human world in which they live

and work, and that reflects the value placed upon social science knowledge and skills by employers and students. Recognising that STEM, social sciences, and the arts & humanities are three quite different and distinct education sectors each with its own strengths would be a good starting point, as would reassurance that the current social science A levels will be included as 'majors' in the proposals.

The evidence base for our areas of concern is set out below.

1) The proposals, in their current form, are unrealistic for logistical reasons

- To meet the timetabling requirements of the proposed Advanced English Standard, there would need to be a significant improvement on teacher recruitment and retention rates. To enable the increase in guided learning hours (GLH) and to meet the requirements of a broadening curriculum, the UK Government would need to ensure its retention and recruitment strategy is effective over the next 5-10 years to secure the pipeline. It is currently not meeting its targets:
- The pupil to teacher ratio (number of pupils per teacher) in state funded schools has increased from 17.1 in November 2010 to 18.0 in November 2022. The same data indicate that in the 12 months to November 2022, around 44,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) qualified teachers left the state-funded sector, a 'leavers rate' of 9.7%. During the same period, 13% of newly-qualified entrants to the sector were not working in the sector one year after qualifying, and 20% were not working in the sector two years post qualification. The five year out-of-service-rate for 2017 qualifiers was 31% and the ten year out-of-service rate for 2012 qualifiers was 41%. The number of reported teacher vacancies (full-time and part-time) in state funded schools has risen steadily from 452 (0.1% of the workforce) in November 2010 to 2,334 (0.5% of the workforce) in 2022, with maths alone having 430 vacancies (1.3% of the workforce). In academic year 2023/24, the recruitment of teachers in English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects as measured by the ITT census was 45% below target.¹

2) The proposals do not reflect (a) the contribution the social sciences make to a broad and balanced education, (b) their importance for wider society and employability, and (c) the popularity of the social sciences amongst pupils and their earnings potentials.

- a) The social sciences equip students to understand the contemporary, fast-changing and complex human world in which they live and the challenges and opportunities that face it.

Social science skills are an essential aspect of a broad and balanced education, preparing young people for their lives ahead. Within the school environment, social sciences contribute significantly to learning by providing insights into human behaviour, societies, economies and places. They also encourage critical thinking and analysis by examining social phenomena and contemporary issues from multiple perspectives – as well as providing a framework for broader civic engagement by equipping students with knowledge about governance, democracy, and economic systems, empowering them to become informed and engaged citizens.

Furthermore, social science insights are required to tackle some of the most complex and pressing problems facing society. This is reinforced by the list of the UK Government's own [Areas of Research Interest](#), which are dominated by the social sciences, and the

¹ All figures from Maisuria, A., Roberts, N., Long, R. & Danechi, S. (2023) [Teacher recruitment and retention in England](#), House of Commons.

Prime Minister's own Five Priorities² which draw heavily on social science disciplines for their measurement and delivery.

Without developing young people's awareness and experience of social science from an early stage, we will not equip them with the skills they need to deliver in the future the real-world impacts currently arising from the UK's social scientists.³

This pipeline of social science talent from school into university is not just important from an academic standpoint, it is central to our nation's ability to respond to emerging technological, economic, social and environmental challenges. Creating the conditions for a strong pathway into social science degrees also helps ensure we have expert teachers of these subjects for the future.

b) The social sciences deliver skills which are in high demand by employers, allowing students to access a wide range of employment sectors and contribute to the economy and society.

The knowledge, skills and ways of thinking that social science subjects confer open up a huge range of career opportunities. Social scientists work across all industries and sectors, deploying a range of skills to the benefit of society. Some social science professions, including law, accountancy and planning, are closely linked to particular subjects and require specialist qualifications. Some other roles relate directly to the knowledge and skills specific to a subject, for example, geospatial analysts trained in geography, operations managers trained in business and management, economists working in the NHS as programme evaluators, political scientists working for polling companies, and psychologists working on organisation behaviours. Many other jobs and careers are open to all social scientists, making use of the wide range of transferable skills gained by studying a social science degree.⁴

Some key data:

- According to the latest LEO data⁵, an average 87% of UK-domiciled first-degree graduates across the social science disciplines were in sustained employment, further study or both five years after graduation. This was slightly lower than the average (89%) for STEM graduates, and higher than the average (84%) for arts and humanities graduates⁶.
- Social science graduates possess transferable skills vital to the prosperity of the UK, and many private sector businesses value social science knowledge and skills. This is reflected in the sector preferences of social science graduates. For example, 17.5% of geography graduates worked in construction, engineering and research and development. A further 17% worked in business and finance. Two-fifths of law graduates worked in the legal and accountancy sector (41.4%). Politics graduates were more likely to enter management consultancy on average than other subjects (5.6%) with a further 16.1% working in business and finance. In general, the top professions for social science graduates were more traditionally linked to the public sector, with legal professionals, primary

² UK Government (2023) [Prime Minister outlines his five key priorities for 2023](#), UK Government website (accessed 14 February 2024).

³ Wagner, S., Rahal, C., Spiers, A. *et al* (2024) [The SHAPE of Research Impact](#), London: British Academy.

⁴ See:

- Greaves, L. (2023) [What do graduates do? Insights and analysis from the UK's largest higher education survey](#), Bristol: Prospects Luminare.
- Academy of Social Sciences, [Careers for Social Scientists](#) briefing note.

⁵ Department for Education in England (2023) [LEO Graduate outcomes provider level data \(tax year 2020/21\)](#), UK Government website (accessed 9 February 2024).

⁶ Subject definitions:

- **Social sciences:** Architecture, Building & Planning; Business & Management; Economics; Education & Teaching; Geography, Earth & Environmental Studies; Law; Politics; Sociology, Social policy & Anthropology.
- **STEM:** Biosciences; Chemistry; Engineering; Mathematics; Medicine & Dentistry; Nursing & Midwifery; Pharmacology, Toxicology & Pharmacy; Physics & Astronomy.
- **Arts & humanities:** Creative Arts & Design; English Studies; History & Archaeology; Languages & Area Studies; Media, Journalism & Communications; Performing Arts; Philosophy & Religious Studies.

education teaching professionals, and welfare and housing associate professionals coming in first, second and third place respectively. ⁷

- Research from the British Academy has shown that UK social science graduates possess a general set of skills, or core skills, that employers find valuable. These include the ability to communicate clearly and work effectively with others, the capabilities to design research, collect and analyse evidence, and make decisions, and useful behavioural and non-cognitive skills in problem-solving, independence, creativity, and adaptability. ⁸
- These same benefits are not just restricted to graduates. Our own analysis has examined how UK private sector businesses value social science insights to run and grow their firms. Most companies consider social science knowledge and skills to be important for leadership cadres, and use social science knowledge and skills from a variety of disciplines including economics, psychology, political science and geography to understand and engage with their markets, clients, staff and consumers. Furthermore, many companies use social science knowledge and skills to analyse and manage risk and long-term strategies. Finally, many companies use social science knowledge and skills, alongside STEM competencies, to innovate and develop new products or new ways of working. ⁹

c) Social sciences are popular and students go on to have good earnings potentials – matching many of those in STEM fields.

Currently, 47% of UK students graduate from university with a social science degree¹⁰ - reflecting not only the popularity of those subjects for their content, but also because students believe they are the key to engaging and rewarding careers. As graduates they have very good employment and earnings potentials. As outlined above, social science disciplines are highly valued by students for both the direct and associated skills they foster. After their undergraduate degrees, they go on to work in a wide range of sectors and occupations, with employment rates and earnings similar to graduates in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths). ¹¹

Some key data:

- Five social science disciplines are among the top ten disciplines for lifetime graduate earnings: economics, law, politics, business studies and geography. Social science disciplines as a group fare about as well as graduates from STEM disciplines in terms of earnings. ¹²
- Five years after graduating, the median salary for a social science first-degree graduate was **£28,438** (tax year 2020/21). This compares to an equivalent arts and humanities figure of **£23,329** and an equivalent STEM figure of **£31,129**^{13,14} (which rises to **£33,200** with Medicine & Dentistry included).
- As outlined above, not only are social science disciplines extremely popular in

⁷ Greaves, L. (2023) [What do graduates do? Insights and analysis from the UK's largest higher education survey](#), Bristol: Prospects Luminare.

⁸ British Academy (2017) [The Right Skills: celebrating skills in the arts, humanities and social sciences](#), London: British Academy.

⁹ Lenihan, A. & Witherspoon, S. (2020) [Vital Business: the essential role of the social sciences in the UK private sector](#), London: Academy of Social Sciences / Campaign for Social Science.

¹⁰ Higher Education Statistics Agency (2023) [What do HE students study?](#), Cheltenham: HESA.

¹¹ See, for example:

- Academy of Social Sciences, [Careers for Social Scientists](#) briefing note.
- British Academy (2020) [Qualified for the Future: quantifying demand for arts, humanities and social science skills](#), London: British Academy.

¹² Britton, J., Dearden, L., der Erve, L. & Waltmann, B. (2020) [The impact of undergraduate degrees on lifetime earnings](#), London: Institute for Fiscal Studies: pp40-41.

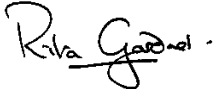
¹³ Department for Education in England (2023), [LEO Graduate and Postgraduate Outcomes \(tax year 2020/21\)](#), UK Government website (accessed 8 February 2024).

¹⁴ Subject categories are the same as for Footnote 6 above.

general (comprising some 47% of undergraduates), but they are particularly important to women, especially in subjects such as Law, Education and Psychology where the proportions of female students are significantly higher than their male counterparts.¹⁵

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and/or your officials to discuss these matters in further detail.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rita Gardner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the name.

Dr Rita Gardner CBE FAcSS
Chief Executive
Academy of Social Sciences
R.Gardner@acss.org.uk

¹⁵ Higher Education Statistics Agency (2023) [What do HE students study?](#), Cheltenham: HESA.