

Why Brexit matters for the humanities and social sciences

Ash Amin and Philip Lewis explain the issues – and what the British Academy advocates



Professor Ash Amin is Head of Geography at the University of Cambridge. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2007, and is the British Academy's Foreign Secretary.

A fundamental mission of the British Academy is to deliver global leadership for the humanities and social sciences, and support the global republic of letters. The Academy was established over a century ago for the express purpose of ensuring that UK academic engagement in what were then referred to as the 'philosophico-historical sciences' was represented in international forums – particularly, at that time, in Europe. Many things have changed since the Academy's foundation, but our profound commitment to international endeavour, to European co-operation, to furthering international and European research collaboration, international relations and to pursuing evidence-based international policy-making remain essential to our *raison d'être*. This always will be the case, because exchange, discussion, debate, co-operation and partnership in the humanities and social sciences are by their very essence collaborative, curiosity-seeking enterprises that flow wherever the mind takes you.

The referendum outcome in June 2016 is undoubtedly a challenge for the humanities and social sciences. UK research excellence draws on collaboration with colleagues in other EU member

states, and the UK requires this to retain its excellence. Sixty per cent of the UK's internationally co-authored research papers are with EU partners. Seven of the UK's top 10 – and 13 of our top 20 – most collaborated with nations are other EU member states. As Colin Crouch illuminates in his article (page 20), knowledge knows no boundaries, and the particular dense network the EU provides is of exceptional value and, if lost, it would not be offset elsewhere. EU research collaboration has also helped develop UK leadership in a number of fields, such as the European Social Survey headquartered at City University London which Ian Diamond refers to in this issue (page 14).

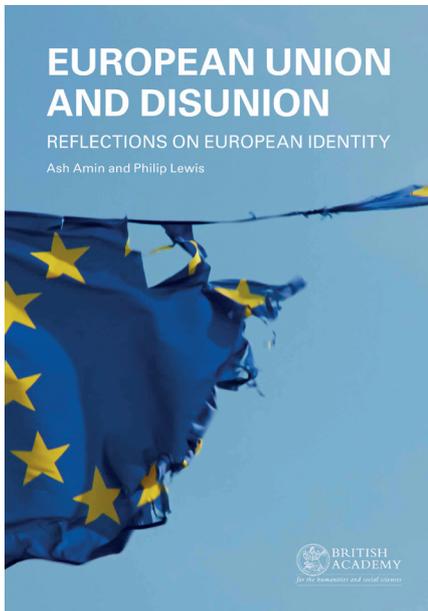
British Academy engagement

Over many years prior to the referendum, the British Academy has diligently built up a track record of working with sister European academies to inform and influence EU research and innovation Framework Programmes, under a series of British Academy Foreign Secretaries, including Duncan Gallie and Helen Wallace, as well as John Bell, the Academy's Europe Working Group Chair. For example, through the All European Academies and our chairmanship of its Social Sciences & Humanities Working Group, when 'Horizon 2020' was being developed we brought Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn to the Academy, where she announced that a sixth societal challenge focused strongly on the humanities and social sciences would be put forward in Horizon 2020 in order to respond to our concerns at their absence in initial proposals.¹



Philip Lewis is Head of International Research and Policy at the British Academy.

1. The text of Máire Geoghegan-Quinn's address at the British Academy on 10 November 2011, on 'The future of social sciences and humanities in Horizon 2020', can be read in *British Academy Review*, 19 (January 2012), 20–23.



In May 2017, the British Academy published a set of essays on *European Union and Disunion: Reflections on European Identity*, edited by Ash Amin and Philip Lewis. More on this project, which the British Academy is pursuing with sister European academies, can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/european-union-and-disunion

This expertise and experience is essential now as the British Academy navigates the post-referendum landscape. John Bell chairs the All European Academies’ Framework Programme 9 Working Group, which just this summer set out a vision for the next EU research and innovation programme in 2021.² The Academy intends to play as full as part as it is able to do so in the years ahead, working with counterparts elsewhere in the EU and the UK, to continue to raise the importance of EU research collaboration and mobility in the humanities and social sciences.

The British Academy, of course, must also attend to the challenges that the UK’s withdrawal from the EU poses for the humanities and social sciences

– for our research collaboration, for researcher mobility, and for the excellent staff and students from all nations who come to and already study and work in our cosmopolitan universities. The Academy has been advocating that the result of the referendum puts at risk the UK’s world-leading research excellence in the humanities and social sciences.³ Scholarship and research flourish in long-term stable and interconnected frameworks that support people, collaboration, resources and regulation. EU membership has provided such frameworks for the humanities and social sciences in the UK, based on:

- our ability to attract an international talent pool through our open labour market;
- working and competing with the best in the EU;
- having a single regulatory framework that we have helped shape in the EU; and
- winning increasing EU funding – through models of funding not available in the UK.

Our top priority for the negotiations is to ensure that the excellence and value of UK-based research, researchers and students in the humanities and social sciences are recognised and supported in the various agreements that will be required during and after the Article 50 process. The UK is currently a world-leading research player in the humanities and social sciences. These disciplines are vital for our future; and the academic communities working in these disciplines deserve the government’s recognition and support. The government should bear in mind the contribution of the humanities and social sciences in an economy that is more than three-quarters services-, professions- and crafts-oriented.

Research

UK-based researchers in the humanities and social sciences, who include many colleagues from other EU countries and further afield, have been exceptionally successful in competitive EU research programmes which have no current counterparts here in the UK. These researchers have won more than 33 per cent of all funding in the humanities and social sciences granted by the European Research Council (ERC) – the flagship European fundamental research funder. In comparison, the life sciences and physical sciences have won less than 20 per cent. This record shows that the humanities and social sciences are an area of strength for the UK. ERC funding won by UK-based researchers in the humanities and social sciences is equivalent to 24 per cent of the average combined budgets of the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. As Simon Goldhill (page 22), Simon Key (page 28) and Rachel Griffith (page 32) illustrate in different ways, the fundamental research funding of the ERC has proven transformational to UK-based researchers in building cross-disciplinary and cross-national research teams in a way that is not currently replicable in the UK. Its loss would be deeply problematic for the continued success for the humanities and social sciences in the UK, and the British Academy has called for the UK’s full participation to be sustained.

More broadly, 13 out of the top 15 disciplines with the highest amount of funding from ‘EU government bodies’ as a total proportion of that discipline’s funding are in the arts, humanities and social sciences. This indicates the success of these disciplines in winning diverse sources of internationally competitive funding.⁴ It is vital that comparable funding with comparable characteris-

2. ‘Developing a Vision for Framework Programme 9: A Position Paper by the ALLEA Working Group Framework Programme 9’ (All European Academies, July 2017).
 3. A collection of the Academy’s statements and submissions on EU research in recent months can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/eu-statements
 4. More on EU research funding can be found in *The role of EU funding in UK research and innovation*, a report commissioned by the Academy of Medical Sciences, the British Academy, the Royal Academy of Engineering, and the Royal Society (Technopolis, 10 May 2017). An appendix includes case studies on archaeology and the European Social Survey.

tics be continued, in order to sustain the world-leading role of the UK's researchers in the humanities and social sciences. Simon Key clearly exemplifies the concerns of those in archaeology about any disruption to EU research funding and the forms of such funding with their inherent collaborative nature and mobility – in which respect Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions have been especially important – and in which the Academy has pressed for continued full UK participation.

Mobility

As regards mobility,⁵ the humanities and social sciences attract a broad range of academics and students internationally, including from the EU. Six out of the top 10 disciplines with the highest proportions of non-UK EU staff are in the humanities and social sciences. Six out of the top seven disciplines with the highest proportion of non-UK EU undergraduates are in the humanities and social sciences as well. These figures indicate the importance of EU nationals to the humanities and the social sciences in the UK; they show how embedded this diverse academic workforce and student body is in the UK; and they demonstrate the current attractiveness of the humanities and social sciences to researchers and students from the EU. Disruption to this attractiveness is a threat to the continued excellence of the UK in these disciplines, as competitor countries look to attract the world-leading academics, and their next generation, currently based in, or considering coming to, the UK.

Providing a right to remain indefinitely and continuation of the current rights of staff and their dependants employed in the UK at the time of UK withdrawal are central to preserve the competitive position of UK humanities and social sciences. In particular it is necessary to safeguard the concerns of staff, students and their dependants on the island of Ireland given the characteristics of the border. Nearly a quarter (24.6 per cent) of staff at Northern Ireland higher education institutions are non-UK EU nationals (the highest proportion anywhere in the UK), and they play a vital part in sustaining higher education and research there, as Anne Fuchs describes in her article (page 25). The British Academy has worked very closely with the Royal Irish Academy both before and after the referendum on a series of activities, including an initial series of briefings published in

October 2017 that have focused on the land border, the Common Travel Area, and the Good Friday Agreement and rights.⁶ The British Academy has also focused attention on the European Convention on Human Rights, publishing in 2016 a series of papers on the implications of any change in the UK's relationship with that Convention for the devolved nations and the UK's international obligations.⁷

New report

The British Academy has frequently been making the case for the humanities and social sciences in public and in private. We have just set out in a new report what is at stake for the humanities and social sciences as the UK withdraws from the EU in a more fulsome way than we can do here.⁸ To be clear, there is action required by the government still, and we have set out a series of priorities for the government to achieve. If such action is not forthcoming, the reputation and excellence of the humanities and social sciences in the UK as a world-leading research environment, destination of choice for talented researchers, and a top research collaborator will be weakened.

We urge the government to maintain and build the UK's research collaboration in the humanities and social sciences with our closest partners in Europe, such as through world-leading mechanisms like the European Research Council, which will require the closest achievable association to current and future EU Framework Programmes. We look for certainty and long-term stability from the government to ensure the foundational frameworks of collaboration, people, resources and regulation for the excellence of the humanities and social sciences can be sustained. Without these guarantees, the contribution of the humanities and social sciences to the UK's economic competitiveness, social well-being, and research creativity will be placed at risk. ■

Brexit means...?

**The British Academy's
Priorities for the Humanities
and Social Sciences in the
Current Negotiations**



BRITISH
ACADEMY
for the humanities and social sciences

5. More on international mobility can be found in *The role of international collaboration and mobility in research: Findings from a qualitative and quantitative study with Fellows and grant recipients of the Royal Society*, British Academy, Royal Academy of Engineering and the Academy of Medical Sciences (March 2017).

6. Four Royal Irish Academy-British Academy Brexit Briefings have been published in October 2017: Mary E. Daly, 'Brexit and the Irish Border: Historical Context'; Gordon Anthony, 'Brexit and the Irish Border: Legal and Political Questions'; Imelda Maher, 'The Common Travel Area: More Than Just Travel'; Chris McCrudden, 'The Good Friday Agreement, Brexit, and Rights'.

7. Colin Harvey, *Northern Ireland and a Bill of Rights for the United Kingdom*; Christine Bell, *Scotland and the British Bill of Rights Proposals*; Thomas Glyn Watkin, *Human Rights from the Perspective of Devolution in Wales*; Tobias Lock, *Human Rights and the UK's International Human Rights Obligations*.

8. *Brexit means ...? The British Academy's Priorities for the Humanities and Social Sciences in the Current Negotiations* (British Academy, November 2017).