Royal Statistical Society
DATA | EVIDENCE | DECISIONS

Written evidence to the Public Bill Committee for the Higher Education and Research Bill

1. The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) is a learned society and professional body for statisticians and data analysts. One of our strategic goals is for statistics as a discipline to thrive, so that methodology is advanced, applied and made accessible, leading to greater understanding of an increasingly complex world.

2. In light of the recommendations of the Nurse Review [1], we believe that the HE Bill should include **a commitment for UKRI to support interdisciplinary research**. In our evidence to the Higher Education Green Paper we submitted that under the existing funding arrangements, the scope to coordinate and maximise statistics' contribution to interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research was not being fully realised [2]. The new UKRI superstructure is expected to improve on this.

3. The Government's higher education white paper stated that UKRI is to manage both a common research fund and 'funds with cross-disciplinary impact'. However, the Bill itself makes no explicit mention of the management of such funds, and we believe the Bill should include this. Under Clause 85 – UK Research and Innovation Functions (page 52, line 18) the National Academies have for example put forward a 'probing' amendment that refers to interdisciplinary research as an activity that the UKRI may support [3]. We welcome this suggestion and hope to see objectives for cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary working fulfilled by the HE Bill.

4. We would value assurance of the purpose of UKRI in this regard, because the purpose of statistics as a discipline, in research and in higher education extends beyond our discipline's foundations in mathematical sciences and this depends on support from Research Councils for researchers who operate across disciplines. We value the work of each individual Council to support statistical research, but statistics' role in cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research also needs explicit support. This is a matter of importance for the over-arching body to address by its support of interdisciplinary research.

References

[1] 'Nurse report proposes new governing structure for UK research councils', *StatsLife*, 24 November 2016, available at: https://www.statslife.org.uk/news/2574-nurse-report-proposes-new-governing-structure-for-uk-research

[2] 'Cross-disciplinary statistics loses out on research funding, says RSS', *StatsLife*, 28 January 2016, available at: https://www.statslife.org.uk/news/2662-cross-disciplinary-nature-of-stats-means-it-loses-funding-says-rss

[3] Royal Society, British Academy, Royal Academy of Engineering, the Academy of Medical Sciences (2016) *Higher Education and Research Bill Commons Committee stage questions raised by the research proposals* (PDF) available from: http://www.raeng.org.uk/publications/responses/higher-education-and-research-bill-commons-committ

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