

1. Please provide evidence of strategies or specific activities that have successfully addressed concerns about the demand for and supply of specific subjects

Politics students appear to be more interested in quantitative skills than in the past because they are aware that these skills may benefit them in the employment market. There is some evidence – a small number of studies into this in Politics for instance – that shows that emphasising these employability benefits to students does have payoffs in encouraging them to engage with QM.

The ESRC National Centre for Research Methods has also helped to raise the skill levels of political scientists in the UK and other initiatives like the Nuffield/ESRC/BA quantitative centres programme, quantitative methods and language based area studies steers in ESRC Doctoral Training Centres are welcome in trying to push these agendas. With some – Nuffield QM centres – it is too early to say what impact they will have, and there will inevitably be some difficulty in recruiting sufficient staff to populate these centres (on which see point 3). With others – language based area studies – these do seem to have stimulated some interest, although inevitably the language-based element of this is considerably weaker in British students, something that needs, and will need, continual intervention to support.

2. Please comment on specific subject areas where you have concerns about the quantity and character of undergraduates and postgraduates flowing through the system

The fact that the teaching of quantitative skills at the undergraduate level is not included in some Politics degrees is an area of concern.

We also have real concerns about the ability of both UG and PG students to undertake intensive language training (European and non-European) to support their studies. Anecdotally, this is impacting on some vital areas – such as EU studies type degrees, degrees which might involve a year abroad etc. It also limits to some degree the potential future of detailed comparative work by PGs, which will inevitably lead to largely reductionist comparative studies which neglect the rich detail that is often only available by being able to immerse yourself in foreign literature and sources. As the SIVs document notes, this has a whole range of serious implications for the UK's place in the world.

3. Please comment on specific subject areas where you have concerns about the sustainability of expertise

Recruitment from within the UK at the senior lecturer and lecturer level is constrained by a shortage of candidates with sufficient expertise in advanced methods. Colleagues with advanced skills are usually recruited from the US and elsewhere in Europe because our postgraduates can rarely compete on advanced methods.

The same broadly applies to languages, with staff incoming from Europe and elsewhere more likely to be multi-lingual and better placed to supervise certain types of subjects. This has REF implications. The classifications in the REF are pushing towards international excellence, thereby encouraging comparative work. The danger is that the sustainability of this expertise in Britain becomes limited because of the lack of language skills, thereby ceding territory to our competitors in comparative politics, international relations etc.

4. Please comment on why a specific subject area(s) is/are considered to be strategically important

Quantitative political science is crucial to understanding the underpinnings of democracy, to evaluating policy and measuring public engagement with politics.

Languages are crucial to the study of politics for the numerous reasons given in the British Academy paper entitled “Contribution to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) consultation on Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subjects (SIVS) dated 20th June 2011. The UK seriously risks falling behind its competitors in this regard. This has implications for the type of comparisons that can be made, the deeper understanding of competitors’ politics and policy, and how that may affect the UK.

5. Please suggest action that should be taken to address concerns about vulnerable provision, taking into account the possibility of collaborative action and activities beyond funding intervention

As a learned society we are already fostering a network of quantitative political scientists but more support could be given to encouraging the teaching of quantitative methods to undergraduates, particularly within institutions that were not included in the recent joint initiative funding.