

## **Political Studies Association Evidence to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee Call for Evidence into the Role and Priorities of the UKRI interim Chair**

### Introduction

1. The Political Studies Association (PSA) is the leading organisation in the UK linking academics working in the field of political studies with practitioners, policy-makers and journalists.
2. Membership of the PSA is open to anyone interested in the study of politics. It spans academics in political science and current affairs, theorists and practitioners, policy-makers, journalists, researchers, politics teachers and students in Higher Education. Membership has grown steadily and now stands at over 1,900, making it the second largest such national association in the world.
3. A charitable organisation, the PSA exists to promote the development of political studies and to encourage education and the advancement of learning in the art and science of government and in other branches of the political sciences.

### Issues to put to Sir John Kingman

4. The social sciences and humanities receive less than 10% of the current RCUK funding allocation, yet they are widely recognised to 1) provide vital insight into ways in which the full benefits to society of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) research can be realised and 2) are critical to identifying responses to major societal challenges such as growing public disenchantment and disengagement with public institutions and democratic processes and societal cohesion. How will Sir John ensure that the design of UKRI and the allocation of funding to the individual research councils will fully reflect the importance of non-STEM subjects to the wellbeing of society? How will the decision-making processes of UKRI be designed to ensure the views of the smaller research councils are given equal weighting to those of the larger research councils in determining what issues are of strategic importance?
5. A key argument for the creation of UKRI – and a major strategic objective of the new organisation – is the need to encourage more multi- and inter-disciplinary research. The design of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework is widely recognised to have incentivised behaviour that undermined multi- and inter-disciplinary research. Lord Stern's Independent Review of the Research Excellence Framework, published in July 2016, acknowledges these problems and includes a number of recommendations to encourage multi- and inter-disciplinary research. Is Sir John planning to implement all of the recommendations in the Stern Review and does he believe that the successful implementation of all the recommendations will provide sufficient incentives for universities to promote multi- and inter-disciplinary research to the degree sought by Sir Paul Nurse in his 2015 review of the research councils? What other reforms will be required in the higher education landscape, including the research publication market, to facilitate these changes? How critical will multi- or inter-disciplinary research experience, spanning the STEM subjects and social sciences and/or humanities, be to the choice of person appointed Chief Executive of UKRI?
6. The Higher Education and Research Bill specifies that government Ministers will appoint UKRI's board and ministers will retain the ability to provide high-level direction as to the allocation of funding. How will Sir John ensure that UKRI will be protected against the inherent risks of ministers directing strategic priorities and funding from a short-term and politicised perspective?

7. The vast bulk (potentially 75%) of funding that will be directly managed by UKRI rather than the individual research councils, will be directed to ODA-eligible projects. Does Sir John recognise the risk of institutions of higher education redirecting research towards these challenges at the expense of innovative multi- and inter-disciplinary research, which does not directly fall under the global challenges remit but could have considerable benefit to British society, and how will he seek to address this potential risk?

Helena Djurkovic for and on behalf of the Political Studies Association  
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Political Studies Association, 113a Jermyn Street, London, SW1Y 6HJ.