

Submission of the British Academy of Management to the ESRC Consultation on the Flinders Review: ‘Fit for the Future? Researcher Development and Research Leadership in the Social Sciences’

The [British Academy of Management](#) (BAM) welcomes the [ESRC’s consultation](#) on Matt Flinders’ [review](#) of research leadership development in the social sciences. **This initiative resonates with our recent and ongoing work to create a framework to support the careers of our members, and we welcome the opportunity to support and assist the ESRC as this process moves forward.**

BAM is the leading authority in the academic field of business and management (B&M) in the UK. As a learned society, we support the community of scholars in this interdisciplinary field and foster engagement with our international peers. We have around 2000 members, almost a quarter of whom are based outside of Britain, and who range from world-renowned thought leaders and top academics in our field to early career researchers and doctoral students.

1. Do the challenges presented in the review around researcher and leadership development fit with your understanding or not? If not, please explain why.

Yes. Professor Flinders’ evidence review clearly depicts the challenges contributing to the current lack of researcher and research leadership development in the social sciences. It also rightly highlights that ‘embedded structural inequalities’ compound these challenges for many members of our community.¹

While some progress has been made by the ESRC on researcher development and leadership (RDL), the overall picture is mixed, as depicted by the varying research outputs from the UK social science community, which range from world-class to aspiring. While social science research in itself is important, it is now vital that impact is generated from this research – both for the continued sustainability of our sector and because of the contribution social science research can and should make in helping to answer the big questions that face our society today.

All of this requires greater researcher and research leadership development that targets all career stages, with sensitivity to the need for greater equity, diversity, and inclusion. Towards this end, **the British Academy of Management (BAM) is in the process of preparing a support framework for researcher development ‘From Content Expert to Management Leadership.’ We hope that this will be a useful platform for supporting the goals of this review, and we will aim to work collaboratively with the ESRC on this issue going forward.**

a. Is there further evidence that should be considered?

Greater RDL support for the whole social science research community is critical. Towards this end we believe that any such framework should both address all career

stages *and* promote greater equity, inclusion and diversity. This may require the consideration of further evidence and gathering additional insights from the research community.

First, while Doctoral Training Centres already play a vital role in researcher development and provide a solid underpinning for Early Career Researchers (ECRs), **there is a need to provide researcher and leadership development through all career stages**. Mid-career level researchers do not have a clear development route. In addition, experienced senior researchers, especially those who have moved to management grades, need support to continue their research and to develop their leadership and mentoring skills.

This is one of the reasons that the support framework for research development BAM is preparing will offer an integrated set of activities at three specified bandings – for early career researchers (ECRs), mid-career researchers (MCRs), and senior career researcher (SCRs) – that is intended to support the Business and Management community in delivering excellent research as appropriate for participants’ career levels.

Our framework will also highlight the challenges that building a research career entails, while offering a portfolio of activities to address those demands as well as other critical components of scholarly life within business and management communities, such as education and teaching. This is because, **at all levels, there appears to be a need to help develop personal effectiveness among researchers**. Existing provisions in this regard are patchy and focused on particular discrete skills, leaving the bigger picture items (such as personal growth, wellbeing, networking, and ethics) to happenstance. We believe that future provisions, such as our platform, must aim to better serve the research community in this regard.

Second, care must also be taken that any national RDL framework for the social sciences supports greater EDI of gender, ethnicity, and social class, rather than reinforcing traditional academic leadership types.

This will require a supportive environment, in which research funding bodies provide greater clarity on where they are – and where they want to be – in relation to any EDI aspects of the framework. One challenge for researchers in the business and management community, for example, has stemmed from the lack of clear EDI norms for grant applications. Reviewers, who are not always given clear guidance on EDI norms, may impose their own ideas in their assessment of a proposal – often with negative consequences for inclusion.

Specific evidence useful for understanding the many challenges faced in regards to EDI, for example, include the Athena SWAN and Race Equality Charters and statistics, reports on equality issues in UK higher education institutions (HEIs)², as well as the leadership development programs of individual HEIs.

b. Are there alternative interpretations in need of review?

2. Would the creation of a national framework for researcher and leadership development be useful or not?

Yes, a national framework for researcher leadership and development in the social sciences would be useful. To be effective, it will need to be developed on the basis of existing insights and best practice drawn from stakeholders within the research community. **Learned societies, like BAM, have expertise to offer in the scoping of such a framework, and existing platforms that can assist with its delivery.** We are here to help.

a. Are there alternative solutions you would favour over this suggested approach?

b. Are there gaps or opportunities missed with this proposition?

It is important to note that one of the most important opportunities for the social sciences is the effective leveraging of research that is cross-disciplinary, and interdisciplinary. As part of the impact agenda, researchers also need to work collaboratively with their stakeholders in the private and other sectors. Yet, there are clear tensions between the demands on researchers to work on such projects, and the reward and recognition frameworks within universities that privilege recognition of disciplinary and individualistic ways of working. Research that is applied, collaborative and on the edge of disciplines can be seen as ‘a career killer’.

Any national RDL framework will thus not only need to help researchers at all career stages develop the skills critical to lead and conduct complex interdisciplinary work. It will also need to be implemented within an environment that recognises the need to properly incentivise and recognise such collaborative work by social scientists.

This means that the success of any national framework on research leadership and development will depend on its alignment with current metrics used to measure the quality of research for the purposes of funding, such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF), as well as those metrics used by universities as criteria for internal promotion and career progression within the social sciences.³ The review rightly recognises that ‘the REF process appears to act as a major obstacle to both inter-disciplinary research and inter-sectoral mobility.’⁴ Yet, it will be important to understand that overcoming this challenge through a national framework goes beyond the reach of the research community alone. It will require partnership, co-development, and buy-in from government, university administrations, and many others in the HEI sector.

3. What is the priority for immediate action?

The first step in establishing a successful national RDL framework for the social sciences will be to establish a broad working group, with a diverse membership, to work with and advise the ESRC.

a. Are early career researchers the key target audience or is there a more pressing need at other career stages?

Early career researcher support is an ongoing provision. Mid-career level leadership development is now needed to ensure that ECR training and development feeds into faculty and university wide research.

Mid-career and senior level research leadership development is indeed particularly needed to ensure that the academic-policy maker nexus is maximised. Instilling better networking skills, for example, is vital to enable the development of trust that leads to mutual benefits between researchers and policy makers.

Moreover, **any national framework and associated development opportunities must also be inclusive**, targeting all academic staff in the social sciences in order to enable mobility between roles within (and among) higher education institutions. In other words, the framework should be designed and delivered in a way that will enable research-active staff at a teaching-focused university to be able to move to a more research-intensive institution over the course of their careers. It should also similarly enable academic staff in teaching-focused roles to transition to a more research-focused career path, if they would like to do so.

Finally, we have identified **a core set of skills and qualities that run through early-, mid-, and senior-career researchers. These should be developed to underpin any future national framework, and to help lend coherence to its delivery across different platforms and disciplines within the social science community.** The content of that core set of skills would likely need to be unpacked with the help of disciplinary learned societies and professional bodies, but there would likely be a keen willingness to help the ESRC in this regard within the community.

4. Which bodies should be responsible for taking the development of research leadership forward?

The ESRC should ultimately be responsible for coordinating and taking forward any national framework for the development of research leadership in the social sciences, with additional resourcing provided from UKRI to achieve this. As discussed below, we believe that there is a role for learned societies across the social sciences, like BAM, to help collaboratively design this framework and, in some cases, deliver parts of it to their constituencies.

There is also an important role for UKRI to play in fostering and actively supporting the development of research leadership in the social sciences. The increasing size, complexity, and interdisciplinarity of research projects means that leadership will need to be shared across disciplines and levels of seniority in the future. Any national framework for the development of research leadership in the social sciences will thus need to incorporate insights not only from learned societies and business, but also from researchers in disciplines outside of the social sciences who fall under the umbrella of the other UKRI research councils, such as the EPSRC. UKRI could easily help support this exchange of knowledge. It could also build on the insights of this review to support leadership development for all career stages across its research councils.

a. Who would you want to see involved/represented in any new governance arrangements

Learned societies have unique insights into the needs of their research-focused members. This is a resource that should be reflected in both the development and governance of any national framework on research leadership.

As part of ESRC's constituency, for example, BAM has been developing our leadership framework to do just this for the business and management community. Our community is uniquely interdisciplinary in scope and, as a result, a great deal of our framework will be held in common with other social science learned societies. It may, therefore, provide useful insights for a wider national framework for the social sciences.

Discipline-based learned societies can also provide an important platform for implementation of a national framework for research leadership in the social sciences. BAM, for example, has a membership of over 2000, and runs numerous doctoral and researcher symposia each year – and all of these events are well-subscribed. BAM's primary focus is on individual development at the ECR and MCR levels and is uniquely placed to deliver this support. At the institutional level, BAM and the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) collaborate in the development of prospective research leaders.

BAM is keen to explore ways in which we can collaborate in researcher and leadership development at a number of levels (ECR, MCR and Senior) with the ESRC. Towards this end, we attach to this consultation response our programme of researcher and leadership development, which we are currently working on.

NOTES

¹ <https://esrc.ukri.org/files/research/fit-for-the-future-researcher-development-and-research-leadership-in-the-social-sciences-review/>, p. 43.

² See, e.g. 'Delivering Diversity; Race and ethnicity in the management pipeline.' (British Academy of Management and the Chartered Management Institute (CMI), 2017), available at: https://www.managers.org.uk/~media/Files/PDF/Insights/CMI_BAM_Delivering_Diversity_2017_Full_Report_Website_Copy.pdf; and 'What Works: supporting women's careers' (Advance HE, 2019), available at: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/support-womens-careers-higher-education>.

³ See Stefanie Reissner's submission to this consultation for more detail on this point. Dr Reissner is a member of the ESRC Peer Review College and a Senior Lecturer in Management & Organisation Studies at Newcastle University Business School.

⁴ <https://esrc.ukri.org/files/research/fit-for-the-future-researcher-development-and-research-leadership-in-the-social-sciences-review/>, p. 43.