

## ● Refining ESRC strategy

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Comments from the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

Following out participation in the webinar on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2011, and based on comments received from the geographical community (Heads of Geography Departments across the UK), we would like to register the following comments about the ESRC's refined strategic priorities.

- We do recognize the need to refine the priorities, given budgetary constraints. We also recognise that these are priorities not a list of new proposed research programmes. However, we do believe it is critical that through this document ESRC affirms its support and encouragement for critical, independent social science research from multiple disciplinary perspectives.
- Primacy seems to have been given to certain sub-disciplines in the way the priorities have been formulated, notably Economics (macro and behavioural). Many of the priorities listed would benefit from an inherently spatial (geographical) perspective. Other social science disciplines have important contributions to make too.
- As currently written the strategic priorities do not encourage contributions at different spatial scales - community, local, regional – there is undue focus on the national. For example, in the section on the *Fair and Vibrant Society* the selection of the social and spatial terminology is of concern. Particular agencies and scales are selected out, others are ignored. There is no reference to localism, for example, and no reference to the agency of the state in creating, mitigating or preventing social inequalities and social innovations.
- The priorities as written seem to be unduly UK focused; insufficient attention has been directed to the importance of international and comparative work. The *Fair and Vibrant Society* theme in particular seems to be largely UK focused. Members of the geographical community also noted the importance of research on the global south that goes beyond the global south as a problem (poverty alleviation or international resilience/disasters) recognising what is to be learnt from social organisation/civic experiences, managing and responding to environmental challenges, the diversity of local experiences as examples.

More specific additional comments include:

- *Economic performance and sustainable growth.* Here we would suggest that attention needs to be paid to the impacts of reduction in state expenditure as well as private sector growth and to the local conditions of growth as well as regional, national and global levels. Also that mention be made to low as well as high skill employment and to de-skilling and out-migration
- A fuller and more critical consideration of the relationship between economic growth and a greener economy is needed. As presently written consideration of a greener economy is presented in a manner that makes it subservient to the recovery of economic growth. Similar comments could be made about the concept of 'sustainable' which seems to be presented solely in economic growth terms.
- *Influencing Behaviour and Informing Interventions.* This section of the strategic priorities does not raise any critical questions concerning the influencing of behaviours and as such promotes normative views. A more nuanced discussion of distinctions between legislation and incentives/social marketing might be more appropriate.

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