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Guidance for Learned Societies in the Humanities and Social Sciences on Strategies and Strategic Planning

Contents

1. Introduction

This guidance has been prepared as a key output of a project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The project was led by Dr Rita Gardner of the Royal Geographical Society and Dr Michael Jubb of the Research Information Network, and overseen by a Steering Group chaired by Professor Philip Ogden of Queen Mary, University of London.

The starting point for the project was a profound belief that learned societies in the humanities and social sciences perform a critical role in the ecology of research and scholarship in the UK. . But in the current rapidly-changing scholarly and research environment, they face potentially-overwhelming challenges, including the introduction by major research funders in the UK of policies to promote a transition to open access for articles published in scholarly journals.

The aim of the project, and more particularly of this guidance, is to provide support for learned societies as they seek to consider, develop and implement strategies to sustain and enhance their activities and services to support, promote and advance the disciplines and communities they represent. The guidance stems from evidence gathered from societies themselves, in the form of documents, responses to an online survey, and in-depth interviews with officers and senior staff.

Trustees and their responsibilities

Many learned societies and related bodies are registered as charities, and this guidance is intended to help trustees fulfil those responsibilities. Guidance from the Charity Commission on the duties of trustees makes clear that among those duties they must plan what a charity will do, what they want it to achieve in line with its purposes, use reasonable skill and care in managing its resources, and avoid inappropriate risks. And the Good Governance Code for the Voluntary and Community Sector, endorsed by the Commission, makes clear that in as part of those duties, the trustees should develop a long-term strategy as well as operational plans and budgets, and monitor performance against those plans and budgets.

Strategies and plans

One of the key messages of this guidance is that learned societies are distinctive, but that there is also huge variety among them. Hence while we hope that the guidance will be useful to a wide range of societies, we can offer no single template for a strategy or a strategic plan. The varying needs and circumstances of different societies, and the risks and challenges they face, mean that while they can learn from each other, the questions they ask, the processes they engage in and the kinds of strategies and plans that result will differ too. Indeed, the relationships between strategies, strategic plans, and business or operating plans may vary too; and some smaller societies may find that they can proceed from a well-constructed statement of strategy direct to a series of annual business or operating plans and budgets without an intervening 'strategic plan'. That is much less likely, we suggest, for medium-sized or larger societies.

2. Context: what kind of society are you?

Learned societies are distinctive organisations, typically established to promote and support work in a particular scholarly discipline, sub-discipline or subject area. There is no precise definition of the criteria an organisation has to meet if it is to count as a learned society, but their typical characteristics mark them as different in many ways from other organisations, even in the voluntary and not-for-profit sector. Many, but by no means all, are registered as charities, with charitable purposes as prescribed under the Charities Act 2011. These are typically defined in terms of the advancement of education and/or the advancement of the arts, culture, heritage or science. Some are incorporated by Royal Charter, with detailed objects, rules of governance and so on set out in the Charter. Others are unincorporated associations, even though in many cases they have constitutions that define their objects in similar terms.

Since the objects and purposes of learned societies are distinctive, their strategies, and the criteria against which they judge success, are likely to be distinctive too. Thus while there may be lessons to be learned from other organisations, particularly in the voluntary and charitable sectors, societies cannot and should not expect to adopt wholesale the processes and practices used by organisations whose objects are very different. Societies have more to learn from each other; hence this guidance.

We have identified in the course of our work nearly two hundred learned societies in the UK which seek to promote the interests of disciplines and subjects in the arts, humanities and social sciences. Even then, that total does not include more than a small proportion of those associations and societies that bring together enthusiasts for a particular author, artist or composer. But the societies we have identified come in many different shapes and sizes. In size, they may differ according to the number of members, their income or financial reserves, or the number of staff they employ (from nil to 30 or more). They may differ also according to

- ❑ the scope of the subject or disciplinary coverage (from major disciplines such as history, geography or economics, to sub-disciplines such as architectural history or cartography, or to cross-disciplinary subject areas such as African studies);

- ❑ the profile of the membership, and the extent to which it is dominated by academics or also includes professional practitioners, school teachers, or lay people with an interest in the subject or discipline;

- ❑ the range of activities - meetings, seminars and conferences, journals and other publications, research grants and bursaries, advocacy and lobbying, public outreach and so on - and the audiences at which they are targeted;

- ❑ the extent to which activities are focused on members as distinct from a broader range of stakeholders, and the differentiation between services for members and non-members (including charges and access to those services).

A relatively small number of societies also perform the role of professional associations, seeking to maintain oversight or control over the practice of those engaged in the profession, in order to safeguard the public interest, as well as representing the interests of professional practitioners. Membership of such bodies may be the formal basis for gaining entry to the profession.

Since societies vary hugely in accordance with these and other dimensions, it is important as a first step in reading this guidance to locate your society in the broader landscape of learned societies in the arts, humanities and social sciences. What is appropriate for one society may not be appropriate for another; and it may help to identify societies with similar characteristics. To help in this, we have mapped societies in two sets of quadrants according to:

a) their disciplinary or subject scope alongside the range of their activities; and

b) their income and the range of their membership.

You may find it particularly helpful to discuss different approaches to formulating strategies and plans with colleagues in societies that seem to fit a profile similar to yours.

3. Why are strategies valuable and important?

Strategies can take many different forms, with varying amounts of detail. Some are relatively brief – one or two pages – but have associated plans and other documents associated with them. Whatever form they take, they are particularly valuable at times of change – both internally and in the external environment – in helping societies to

❏ clarify the society's purposes: what are we here for?

❏ set direction: where do we think we are heading, why, and how might we get there?

❏ identify and address key risks, issues and challenges, both in the internal and the external environments;

❏ provide a coherent statement and thus help to improve communications with staff, trustees, members and other stakeholders;

❏ develop commitment from staff, trustees and members in working towards shared goals;

❏ identify priorities and resources required (time, expertise and energy as well as money); and to plan for and allocate the resources identified.

You can find useful guidance on strategies and how to develop and implement them on the Knowhow Nonprofit website of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, and on the Planning Advisory Service website. There is also a wealth of advice on other websites, along with examples of plans from a wide range of organisations; and you may wish to draw on the case studies in Section 8 and the society plans to which we provide links at in Section 6.1.

3.1 Clarifying the society's purposes

For those societies that are charities, and still more for those that are chartered, the purposes of the organisation are set out in governing documents. In some cases, however, those objects and purposes may be defined in very general terms, or have been drafted many years ago. Hence they may need to be refined or updated to take account of more recent developments both within the society and its activities, and in the wider environment in which it operates. One chief executive suggested to us that as the external environment becomes more complex, societies that had given relatively low priority to strategic thinking and planning were now realising that strategy is central to their concerns and their well-being. Another suggested that a process of strategic thinking had given the society a

'*better understanding of the society as a charity, and therefore our mission'.*

A third said that the strategy is liberating:

'*the strategic aims are now linked clearly to the objects set out in the charter, and can be clearly communicated to everyone involved in the society, or interested in its work'.*

The strategy also enables the society to hold itself to account for the work it does and the public good it seeks to achieve.

3.2 Setting direction: key aims and objectives

Several chief executives, trustees and respondents to our survey indicated that developing a strategy had enabled the society to determine key aims and objectives for the next three to five years, and thus to focus its programmes of activity on strategic goals or objectives rather than responding ad hoc to new developments or suggested initiatives. Typical comments were

'*....it allowed us to take a step back and make sure that our activities met our goals'*

'*it has given a focus to our work'*

'..... enabled us to frame our activities in a more coherent way and to confirm that activities and aims were relevant and worthy but in need of updating'

'more focused….continuing what we were doing before but doing it better'

'...served as a way to articulate many of the things we would have been doing. It shows our direction'

'provides clarity over the services the society provides, and their relative importance'.

In this way, the strategies have also facilitated subsequent decision-making, about what to do, and also what not to do. Typical comments here were

'programmes of activity are increasingly driven by long-term objectives rather than ad hoc short-term desires'

'...important that everything is critically evaluated …. so that we are not just reactive to changing circumstances'

'to say 'No' to requests to engage in activities that do not fall within the framework of the plan'.

And a particular value of strategies is to set priorities and provide a framework for the development of new activities. As one of our interviewees put it, the strategy

'provides a yardstick against which to decide on new ideas'.

3.3   Identifying key issues and challenges

Many societies that publish scholarly journals have identified open access, and the policies to promote it, as key risks to their financial health and their ability to sustain their programmes of activity. But most of them see open access as a risk in the medium to long term. They see little impact on their journals at present, nor do they expect to see any significant impact in the short-to-medium term. Hence for the great majority of societies open access does not currently represent a 'burning bridge' and as yet it has featured relatively little in their discussions about strategy. Nevertheless, it will be an important matter to be kept under review in future strategy exercises.

But other external challenges may include

❑   relationships with and competition from other societies or associations in related areas;

❑   relationships with key funders or funding sources;

❑   developments in the knowledge economy;

❑   changes in the demographic profile of the scholarly community; and risks faced by the seed-corn of the profession in the form of early-career researchers.

But internal challenges may be equally if not more important, including

❑   falling or static membership, or concerns about the profile of the membership;

❑   lack of capacity to take on new roles and activities;

❑   activities that have become loss-making;

❑   concerns about the adequacy of governance structures; and

❑   resistance to change among the membership.

Identifying a major challenge of this kind – particularly if it is seen as an imminent and serious risk to the society - is sometimes the trigger for a society deciding to undertake a strategic review. But even if that is not the case, it can be very useful to take the time to articulate such challenges, the risks they

pose to the society and to its discipline or subject area, and the actions that could or should be taken to mitigate such risks. One society sees its most recent strategic review as having had a profound effect in changing it from an inward-looking and elitist body to one which is much more open to all who have an interest in the discipline.

3.4 Improving communications with staff, trustees, members and other stakeholders

A clear and well-articulated strategy provides a powerful mechanism for communicating with members (actual and potential), staff, trustees and other stakeholders. It enables them to understand what the society is about, and what it is seeking to achieve. Once it is in place, it helps internal audiences to understand why certain decisions are being taken, in terms of new activities, or the cessation of existing ones.

A clear strategy can also help, as one society put it, *'to improve the image of the [society]'* even while acknowledging that it can still be improved. The society is thus better able to attract new members and retain existing ones; and to attract and retain external funders and supporters. Another society thus talked of the importance of being able to take the strategy to funders and say *'this is what we do and how we intend to do it'*.

Yet other societies mentioned the enhanced credibility that a clear strategy generates for their advocacy and lobbying activities, which they feel are more likely to receive a positive response when they can point to a clear strategy document. For all these reasons, one society decided as part of its strategy, to remodel all its communications, and to establish a new website, while another says that it is now more responsive and outward-facing, making use of social media and '*ready to put its head above the parapet'*. Perhaps even more radically, another decided to produce podcasts from presentations at conferences and seminars, and from lectures aimed at sixth form students, so that they could reach audiences far beyond those who could attend physically.

3.5 Generating commitment from staff, trustees and members

A strategy can also provide clarity of purpose for all those involved in a society and its work, enhancing understanding between members, staff and trustees, and thus serve as a powerful motivating force. Typical comments include:

> '*time spent on this is not wasted – it builds a much greater sense of common purpose between governing bodies and staff'*

> '*it is motivating for staff and trustees, who are driven by the achievement of goals'*

> '*the governing body has a much better idea of what the staff do and how much work can reasonably be undertaken; they also have gained a better idea of how the society's resources (both human and financial) can be utilised'*

> '*it has enabled the whole staff to " think big ideas". They had never done that before and that was certainly worth it in terms of staff engagement and contribution'*

> '*it has helped staff see how what they are doing contributes directly to the strategic ambition of the society'*

> '*helped the senior management team engage more meaningfully with the Board in strategic considerations rather than operational ones'*

Such positive outcomes depend, of course, on the procedures leading to the formulation of the strategy being seen as properly consultative and inclusive. Otherwise there is the risk of dissent and lack of commitment. In one or two cases we have heard of concerns that activities and priorities to which senior trustees were much attached have been excluded when strategic plans have been drawn up. We consider ways to avoid such problems in Section 5.2.

3.6   *Identifying priorities and the resources required to achieve them*

No organisation can do everything that it would ideally like to do, and deciding on priorities is a key part of determining a strategy. Such thinking must take account in at least general terms of the resources of expertise, time and energy as well as cash available in attempting to achieve strategic priorities; but more detailed work to allocate the resources may be needed once the strategy has been agreed.

The key benefit is that the allocation of resources is indeed linked to the strategic objectives. This may involve shifting resources from one activity to another, and this in turn may require a different skill-set among staff and possibly trustees.

In some cases this has led societies to a complete restructuring of their activities – and the staff, committees and members of the Board responsible for them - around each of the strategic goals.

Many other societies identify the benefits that have arisen from new strategic approaches.

> *'it has enabled us to allocate resources to ensure that the focus is on achieving the strategic objectives, rather than just to what has been funded in the past'*

> *'we've identified areas of activity that could be better resourced and areas or groups / people that could be more usefully worked with'.*

> *'a means of focusing resources on core aims and a small number of achievable objectives'*

In some cases this may mean restricting or narrowing down activities.

> *'the approach is that the society should be doing more only if there is a clear advantage to the society and to beneficiaries … the strategic plan and the budget are now aligned.'*

> *'the catalyst for us to take a couple of big decisions such as stopping activities which were done for historic reasons and not helping us reach our goals'*

> *'the need to focus on valued services for members and not 'changing the world'.*

As a result, some societies have been able to become *'more sustainable'* and in at least one case a new strategy is said to have *'contributed to a move towards financial viability'*. It is important, however, that strategies should achieve an appropriate balance between ambition and 'blue skies' thinking on the one hand, and feasibility and sustainability on the other. One society found that its strategy was

> *'too large, too idealistic, not enough based on what is feasible'*

But from the other extreme, another found its current strategy

> *'focused on income, costs and service delivery – it does not have a blue skies element, nor foresight'.*

Getting the balance right can be tricky, and we offer some guidance on this in Section 5.2.

3.7   *Changes in operations and activities*

Several societies point ways in which a new strategy has brought with it major developments in activities and operations. A common theme across a number of medium to large-scale societies has been to re-organise their governance structures so that they fit better with current circumstances. In some cases this has taken the form of structuring the governance explicitly around the core goals or aims set out in the strategy (for example by assigning to each Vice President responsibility for one of those goals or aims). But in other cases, the re-organisation has been simply to reform a structure that had become outdated and/or ineffective.

In similar vein, other societies have taken the opportunity to revise the structures and processes surrounding their special interest groups (SIGs) so that they can operate more effectively (and freely) within the frameworks set by the society's overall strategy.

Innovations in activities have included:

❑ the initiation of new grant schemes, or the enhancement of existing ones, typically by re-allocation of resources from other areas of activity;

❑ using new technologies to expand the reach of existing activities by, for example, making conference, seminar and workshop presentations accessible online, or by live streaming from events, with facilities for submitting questions and comments online;

❑ generating and circulating – with varying levels and different kinds of specialist help - expert briefing material on specialist topics, and also using such materials as the basis for enhancing contacts with mainstream and specialist media outlets, so that material is to hand when need or opportunity arises;

❑ merging with or absorbing related societies and organisations (which may be a trigger for initiating a strategy exercise; while in other cases the existence of the strategy has facilitated a merger);

❑ establishing a capacity for research and policy analysis in areas of interest to the society.

A common thread running through such innovations has been to shift the focus of the society and its activities so that it has become more outward-facing.

3.8   *Formats for strategies*

The formats and length of strategies and plans vary hugely, depending on the nature of the society, and also on the audience to which such documents are directed. What is appropriate for one society or for one kind of audience may not be at all appropriate for another. Some strategies amount to a few bullet points identifying aims, objectives and perhaps priorities on a single sheet of paper; others are significantly longer. But it's important to stress that a strategy is much more than a mission statement. It must at the very least set out some clear goals or aims, and what will be done in order to meet them.

Some strategies are explicitly addressed to internal audiences, while others have a stronger external focus. Related to the question of audience, some strategies include specific quantified targets; while others leave quantified objectives and targets to the separate but related exercise of developing and agreeing annual operational plans and objectives for staff .Indeed, some societies suggest that a key benefit of their strategies has been to enable them

> '*to develop far more relevant operational and work plans that tie directly to strategic objectives*'

Different versions of a strategy may thus need to be developed for different audiences.

We provide links to examples of society's strategies and plans at Section 6.1, so that you may see the many different forms they take.

4. Formulating a strategy: key questions

In order to formulate a strategy, and secure the kinds of benefits set out in Section 3, any organisation must think hard about key questions, which may be summarised as 'where are we now?' and 'where do we want to be and how might we get there?'. In this section, we consider the major issues that arise under each of those major questions. We consider the processes through which such questions can be addressed in Section 5.

4.1   Where are we now?

A hard look at the society's current performance is an essential starting point for thinking about strategies for the future. It involves assessing evidence on a number of issues.

4.1.1   What are we trying to achieve as a society?

Many societies have pointed to the importance of starting by asking fundamental questions about their core purposes or mission, aims, and the values they are seeking to promote. As more than one society put it, they needed to ask '*What do we exist for*?'. That may well involve thinking hard not just about activities, but about what benefits the society is seeking to provide to whom, and how these fit with the society's core objects. That in turn may require a thorough examination of the external environment and competition from other organisations, including other societies.

Stakeholder analysis may also be helpful here, thinking through:

- ❑ who your key stakeholders are: different groups of members and potential members; the universities and other institutions in which they work; schools and other educational organisations; Government and other public bodies; research funders; other organisations that support the society and its work; and other individuals and organisations in the UK and overseas that may have an interest in the subjects or disciplines that your society seeks to promote;

- ❑ the varying interests, needs and expectations of those different groups of stakeholders and in particular the balance between the interests of members and non-members, and how the society engages with them; and how those interests intersect with, or affect your society;

- ❑ a ranking of the importance for your society of those different groups of individuals and organisations, and how your society might most effectively build and manage relationships with them.

There are a number of simple tools that may help in an analysis of this kind. A useful starting point is on the NCVO Knowhow site. The value of this kind of approach is that it focuses not so much on activities, as on the key audiences the society is seeking to reach, to influence or support. It also involves thinking through why and how the interests of different groups are important to the society, and why the benefits the society is seeking to provide are important to those different groups.

As one society put it, you may need to find out what other people and organisations think about your society, what it is doing, and how valued it is. That in turn leads to questions as to how broadly (or narrowly) the society currently defines its audiences, and why. Focusing attention on a relatively narrow range of specific groups may be appropriate for smaller societies. Other larger societies have decided that as charities they must look to provide benefits and value to civil society as a whole, and not just to the academic community or to those who happen to be members.

4.1.2   How successful are we in achieving our purposes?

Taking stock of what the society currently does, and how that fits with its core purposes, is an essential part of thinking about strategies for the future. So it's important to ensure that you have an in-depth understanding of the society's activities and the value that they provide to members and other stakeholders. Some societies approach this by focusing on groups of core activities in turn, assessing them in terms of the society's objects and purposes, and the benefits it is seeking to provide.

Many people will be familiar with the analysis of internal strengths and weaknesses that is part of a SWOT analysis. This involves thinking hard-headedly about

- ❏ what the society does well or indifferently;

- ❏ what *members think* is done well or indifferently;

- ❏ perceived gaps in activities and services;

- ❏ the activities which are most or least successful in achieving the benefits for members and other groups that the society seeks; and

- ❏ any changes in the wider environment that are having an adverse impact on the society.

Many societies have used this kind of approach to identify and build on what they do best. As one relatively small society which concentrates on services for its members puts it

> *'we focus on how to support and provide services valued by your members'*

4.1.3 What does our community, discipline, membership and other stakeholders want or need?

Many societies conduct surveys of members and monitor attendance and participation in events and other activities, via feedback forms and the like. Others rely on regular interactions between officers and staff on the one hand, and members on the other, or on monitoring members' renewal rates and participation in elections to the Council or Board. But it is important to gather as many sources of evidence as possible as to the needs and wants of members and other stakeholders, and the extent to which they are being met.

Some societies have noticed that while academic members are generally content with the services they receive, non-academic members are less satisfied; and they have hence concluded that they need to do more to understand the needs of such members, and how they might best be met within the resources likely to be available. That is not to say that societies should do everything that members want: as one society puts it, members' expectations are sometimes unrealistic, and '*we can't do everything'*. That is an issue that needs to be tackled through effective communication both during and after the process of producing a strategy. Another society is clear that it must not be 'trapped' by the needs of the current membership, but must rather take a broader view of its role, which may attract new kinds of members to the society, since they see value in the services it provides.

Where societies do see their roles as extending beyond the needs of academic members, it is important that they consider carefully

- ❏ who the key groups of external stakeholders are;

- ❏ their interests and expectations; and

- ❏ how the society might most effectively communicate with, and seek engagement from, members of key stakeholder groups .

A number of societies communicate with external groups by circulating regular newsletters and briefing papers on issues of interest and concern in their discipline; but securing active engagement is often harder. Both academic and non-academic members are often keen for societies to do more to develop contacts with external stakeholders, as well as more straightforward communication via

briefing papers and the like, the reach and effectiveness of which is monitored via websites and so on. But personal contact with members of key external stakeholder groups can also be critically important, in order to champion and promote the disciplines and subjects that societies represent, as well as to ensure that societies have a clear understanding of what they can most usefully provide in the way of services to those different groups.

4.1.4 How efficiently and effectively do we generate and use our financial and other resources?

Societies need to analyse carefully the different sources of their incoming resources: membership subscriptions, fees for conferences and other events, publications, investments, grants and other sources, and the balance between them as a whole. There are then important questions about how expenditure of resources – the time and energy of officers and staff as well as cash – relates to the core objects and purposes of the society, and to the benefits it is seeking to provide for the discipline and to members, key non-member groups and other stakeholders. In that context, societies need to be clear about

❏ which activities generate revenues, and which consume them;

❏ whether they and those who are providing the revenues are content with the current pattern;

❏ the risks to current sources and levels of income;

❏ the scope for increasing revenues; and

❏ the scope for reducing expenditure.

Income

For those societies that **publish journals** (especially if they outsource the publications to a specialist publisher), the surplus on the publications account is sometimes the largest single source of income, used to fund other activities. In those circumstances, societies are very conscious of the time, energy and expertise provided by members and others in supporting the publication process, and of the risks posed by current policies from research funders promoting a shift to open access. As we have noted earlier, societies are as yet (2015) seeing relatively little negative impact from such policies, but it will be important to keep the issue under very active review. For a relatively small number of societies, we recognise that publications are only minor source of income; some societies actually make a loss on their publications, and are content to do so.

Income from **membership subscriptions** also varies considerably in importance. Some societies have decided to keep the level of subscriptions low in order to attract members or for other reasons; but other societies are very much aware that a decision of this kind limits their ability to extend or enhance their activities and services. Hence some societies deliberately seek to make a surplus on their services to members, while others (particularly those that have some of the characteristics of professional societies) earn significant income from **CPD and other courses**, or from **accreditation services.**

For some societies, income from **conferences, workshops** and other related activities – for the benefit of both members and non-members - is a significant source of revenue; but other societies take the view that such activities should do no more than break even, or even run at a loss as a service to their members and other communities.

Yet other societies have built up significant ***investments*** on their balance sheets, and use their investment income either as a buffer against financial risk, or as a means to support new initiatives. But few of the smaller societies have the luxury of significant amounts of investment income.

Finally, it is important for all societies to acknowledge and assess the extent to which they depend on the resources of time, energy and expertise provided by volunteers, whether as officers, trustees or members. Societies need then to ask whether current levels of such resources are likely to be sustained, and if not, how this might impact on the society as a whole.

Expenditure

For those societies that employ staff, ***salaries,*** pensions and so on are typically the major expenditure item; and any decisions to add to or reduce staff numbers are thus of critical importance. Some societies have decided, even though they have sufficient funds to meet staff costs, instead to pay honoraria to officers to enable them to meet the costs of the secretarial and administrative support they need during their period of office; and others contract with universities or other institutions to employ staff on their behalf.

Other ***administrative expenses*** tend to be low. Premises – where they are needed – are often rented from universities on favourable terms; and only a very small minority of societies own their own property.

Hence other major heads of expenditure tend to be on directly public good or ***member services***. These include ***conferences and meetings***, though societies differ as to whether they expect meetings to cover their costs out of payments by participants, or to be subsidised or even free of charge, with costs met from other sources of revenue. It is important that such matters are fully discussed in any process to develop a new strategy.

Grant schemes feature prominently in many societies' activities, with support for small research projects, bursaries for early career researchers, grants for seminars and workshops, and so on. Levels of competition for such grants vary significantly; but some societies devote considerable resources to the administration of such schemes, while others are much more light-touch in their procedures. A relatively small number of societies see their grant schemes as among their core purposes, and as an essential complement to the grant schemes run by the Research Councils, the major grant-giving charities, and other public bodies. Again, it is important that such issues should be open for discussion in the process of developing a new strategy.

4.1.5 *How do our activities relate to those of other societies or organisations active in our field?*

Societies operate in a complex environment, even within their specialised fields. There are intricate relationships between societies covering the whole of a major discipline, such as sociology or archaeology on the one hand, and those covering sub-disciplines (such as criminology or environmental archaeology), or cross disciplinary subject areas (such as Latin American Studies) on the other. Societies covering broadly similar fields of scholarship –in for example, philosophy or education – may have significantly different profiles of members (the extent to which they extend beyond the academic community, for instance) and of activities; and they may focus their activities and services on different audiences. Academics, teachers and other groups of members may choose to join more than one society, and vary in their levels of engagement with different societies.

Each society, therefore, has to think about its distinctive characteristics, its relationships with other societies and subject associations, and how they complement or compete with each other. Some

societies have built up very close relationships, with regular liaison between them, and clear, but often overlapping, areas of interest and activity. Some work in partnership on joint activities; and in areas such as archaeology there are well-established mechanisms, through bodies such as the Council for British Archaeology, for helping to cement such co-operation, which can also help to increase efficiency and effectiveness in expenditure of resources.

But it can be difficult to work closely with other societies that have different interests, resources and ways of operating. Some societies may therefore largely ignore the activities of societies and other organisations that seem to work in closely related areas. And for yet other societies, relationships are more like rivalry and competition than partnership. In societies covering a large discipline, for instance, special interest groups may compete directly with a separate society that seeks to support a sub-discipline, and vice versa. Different societies have reported loss of members and of influence in both directions.

Hence societies must be clear about those societies with which they are partnering successfully, or where the partnership is moribund or even damaging.

4.2   Where would we like to be and how might we get there?

Learned societies operate in a fast changing environment, and it is important to examine:

- ❏   what is changing and how;
- ❏   how this may affect the society, its members and stakeholders;
- ❏   options for the future development of the society; and
- ❏   actions that may be necessary in order to achieve them.

Thinking about the future thus involves a number of questions.

4.2.1 How is the environment we work in changing, and how is it likely to affect us?

Changes in the external environment that may affect your society come in many different forms. Their impact and effects vary similarly: they may be financial or operational on the one hand; or they may represent either a threat or an opportunity on the other.

Schools and universities

Changes in the education sector, at both school and university levels, may have profound effects on subjects and disciplines, and hence on societies and those they seek to support and serve. The same is clearly true of changes in levels of research funding, and the policies of research funders.

Societies must therefore be aware of and seek to understand such changes and their likely impact, and how it might be possible to influence changes in the future. This is made more complex as the structures and policy imperatives of Government and non-departmental public bodies change; and for the majority of societies that seek to cover the whole of the UK, devolution of responsibilities to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has added yet a further layer of complexity.

Some societies are concerned about the increasing pressures on early-career researchers, while others express concerns about changes in initial teacher training and its impact in their subject or discipline. As one society puts it, they need to be

> 'constantly aware of the broader academic context in which we work, and try to be proactive about change'.

Another realises that in their next strategy exercise, they need to

> *examine the effects of the 'evidence agenda' on research and teaching [in their subject area].*

Other societies

Changes in the activities and plans of other societies and related organisations may also have an impact, while for societies with significant publishing operations and income, the continuing rapid changes in publishing, and funders' policies relating to open access, are certain to have an impact over the next few years. As part of the review of relationships with other societies, each society should review whether or not it wishes to build on or extend existing partnerships, or to compete, or whether merger might be an option. The Charity Commission is considering how it might raise awareness of collaborations and mergers as elements of strategic planning.

Examples among learned societies include the Classical Association, which has close relationships with the Societies for Roman Studies and Hellenic Studies, which are in turn closely associated with the Institute of Classical Studies in the School of Advanced Studies in the University of London. It has also recently taken over responsibility for the schools-based Joint Association of Classical Teachers. In a very different field, the British Sociological Association both partners and competes with sub-discipline societies such as the Criminology Society and the Social Policy Association; but it has recently taken over responsibility for the Association for the Teaching of Social Sciences (again schools-based). In both these cases, the merger with a schools-based organisation has brought a welcome extension to the interests and activities of the society. But in other subjects and disciplines (for example history and geography), societies covering the schools as distinct from the university and research sectors remain separate, although often with close working relationships.

Subjects and disciplines

Other changes may come from within subjects or disciplines themselves. Some societies have lost members in the past, or failed to exploit the potential for expanding their membership, because they have not responded adequately to new developments in the discipline, or changes in the profile of those who are active in the field or the profession.

Knowledge economy

For the majority of societies for which outreach and engagement beyond the membership is an important aim, it is important to be aware of changes in the wider knowledge economy, the impact of technological change, and how they might exploit and influence such changes. As one society put it *'we need to do more horizon scanning';* while another pointed out that in a period of rapid change, it was important that any strategy or plan should be flexible and not constraining.

4.2.2 Do we expect to grow, contract, or stay the same?

For some societies, maintaining a broadly steady state in terms of membership, resources and activities in a time of change may be a reasonable aim or expectation. But societies will have to think about the actions they will have to take to achieve such a steady state, and avoid the risk of stasis leading to decline.

 For other societies which are conscious of financial and other constraints affecting both themselves and their membership, a natural response may be to '*batten down the hatches'* as one society put it; and in some cases it may be thought necessary to reduce or close down activities that no longer fit with current circumstances and aims. But both staff and members need the optimism that comes from setting decision-making in the context of an effective strategy; and financial and other constraints may also be thought of as an opportunity to think creatively about new ways of doing things. Members and

staff need to feel that the society is seeking to achieve something more than mere viability. Focusing on survival alone is likely to lead to contraction and ossification.

Thus for yet other societies, growth and the potential for enhancement of activities may be a natural expectation, though as noted earlier (Section 3.6) it's important to achieve an appropriate balance between ambition and realism, and whether the expected growth can actually be achieved. We consider this further in Section 4.2.3.

4.2.3   What are our ambitions, and why?

For a number of societies, one of the main lessons from previous strategy exercises has been the need to express ambition. For without ambition there is the risk of stasis and worse. Hence it is important to think hard about possible opportunities and how they might be exploited, and about possibilities for new or enhanced activities, as well as current activities that might be curtailed or even stopped.

Policy and public affairs

Many societies see major opportunities to engage in more policy and public affairs activities in their areas of interest, through briefings, surveys, lectures and seminars aimed at specific audiences, and regular engagement with both specialist and generalist media. Through such means they seek to promote their discipline and the interests of research and scholarship, but also to make positive contributions to current debates, exploiting the expertise of their members and making them available for specialist comment, discussion and advice as appropriate. Hence some societies are planning to increase such activities significantly.

> '*we plan to develop our advocacy and policy activities, to become a powerful voice for the academic community in [our subject area]*'

> '*the policy and public affairs agenda is limitless, but a huge opportunity which needs much more input and effort from us*'

Such activities may require creating banks of briefing materials to be used as occasion demands, rather than waiting for opportunities to arise when response times are very short. It may also require collaboration with other societies and organisations covering similar or related areas of interest. But since the scope for such activities is so large, societies need to assess where and how they can have the greatest effect.

New forms of outreach and communication

Websites are a key resource in outreach and communications both with members and wider groups of stakeholders; and some societies are now beginning to exploit the interactive potential of their websites. Thus the development of online resources – briefings, podcasts, webinars, blogs and the like - has been a major imperative for several societies, along with an expanding use of social media to reach new and extended audiences. All these mechanisms offer powerful ways of engaging and communicating with people – in the UK and beyond - who may not otherwise have any knowledge of or contact with the society. As one society puts it

> '*we need to develop the online offer both to members and to external stakeholders, in the form of podcasts, webinars and so on, and our use of social media*'

Members are often keen to see more such developments, and for societies to develop more forums and other mechanisms through which they and their members might engage more effectively – in the interest of the discipline - with major interest groups beyond academia, including school teachers, policy makers, and interested members of the general public. That implies developing appropriate expertise and resources to communicate effectively with different stakeholder groups, and thereby to build a reputation for effective contributions and dialogue.

Expanding the membership

Many societies are also keen to extend their active base of members beyond academia to include wider stakeholder groups, though it is not always easy to achieve that, at least in the short term; and in some cases, societies are keen to ensure that research remains the core of their membership and activities.

Ambition and priorities

In all these, areas, and indeed others, it is important for societies to frame their ambitions and priorities in terms of their core objects: what do they want to achieve in the future and why; how does this fit with their current profile of activities; and do they have – or can they develop – the expertise and resources to fulfil their ambitions.

4.2.4   What do we need to do to achieve our ambitions?

In developing their strategies, societies must clearly think about the actions and resources needed to achieve their aims and objectives. As one society put it, you need to be

> '*very clear about what is possible within the resources available'.*

In some cases this may mean adding to or restructuring staff resources, or assigning new responsibilities to officers of the society. In others it may require shifts of revenue from one activity to another, or major fund-raising. Thus one society has decided to use some of its reserves, as well as resources from a fund-raising campaign, to increase its grants to early-career researchers, to invest more in its publications, and to increase its capacity for research into issues affecting researchers in its discipline. Another is considering whether to increase its staffing or to outsource some of its administrative tasks relating, for instance, to conferences and other events.

In this context, it is important for societies to consider carefully whether their ambitions imply a *sustained* increase or re-profiling of their activities, or to adopt new priorities for a time-limited period. This in turn will have an impact on the funds and other resources needed to implement the strategy.

4.2.5   What are the key challenges we need to address?

As we noted in Section 3.3, challenges may be external or internal. Among the former, several societies are conscious of the risks we have already mentioned relating to open access publishing. Societies vary widely as to the extent to which they depend on income from journals to fund other activities; and while there is little sign as yet of significant falls in publishing income, some societies are resigned to such a fall in the medium term. There are also concerns about possible risks to the quality of journals if there are moves to produce them 'on the cheap'. Hence some societies are looking to develop new publishing models, and to add value to the products of their publishing programmes.

Other societies are concerned also about challenges arising from the demographic profiles of their members and potential members: disproportionate numbers of older or younger members of the core profession; imbalances between men and women, lack of ethnic diversity and so on. Such imbalances can pose risks both to the society and more broadly to the subjects or disciplines they seek to represent and promote.

Demographic profiles can thus be associated with internal challenges in the form of tensions between groups of members with different cultures and expectations of the society and the services it provides. Some societies, therefore, are conscious that there are different groups – within and beyond the

membership – who have different interests and may seek to pursue their own agendas. This can give rise to challenges in

> *changing cultures and perceptions among some groups of members who tend to see the society as a framework for their own activities'*

> *'managing individuals and groups with differing agendas, and arriving at decisions'*

> *'supporting a diverse community of members, who wish to remain pluralistic,; but this makes it difficult to speak with one voice.*

4.2.6 Opportunities to cut costs or to increase income

Strategy exercises should always, as we have noted in Section 4.1.4, include a review of the main heads of expenditure; and it may be that in looking to the future, there is a need to consider how costs can be reduced under one or more of the main heads. But there should also be a review of opportunities to increase income. We have noted in our evidence-gathering that only a relatively small number of societies engage actively in fund-raising to support specific projects or grant schemes. Moreover, it is noticeable that active efforts and strategies to increase income are relatively rare among learned societies in the social sciences and humanities, despite the large number of them that are registered as charities.

Membership

Some societies are actively seeking to increase the size of their membership in order to increase their income, but such strategies are likely to take some time to have a significant impact, except in the case of a merger with another society (see Section 4.1.6). And most societies are very cautious about increasing subscription prices, for fear of loss of members. Only a very few societies are taking active steps to seek donations or legacies from their members

Charges for services

Many societies are similarly reluctant to increase their charges for services such as conferences, meetings and workshops in order to generate income for other activities and public good services. Only a small number of societies appear to have the scope or the capacity to develop services that might generate income from stakeholders in the commercial, public or voluntary sectors

Fund-raising from foundations and other sources

Again, only a small number of societies are taking active measures to seek grants from charitable foundations or other sources, to enable them to extend the range of their activities. For the majority of societies, grants from external bodies constitute at most a relatively minor part of their income.

Strategy and income generation

We suggest that examining the potential for increasing income from a range of sources should be an integral part of any strategy exercise, while recognising that the scale of that potential may be small in many cases, especially for the smaller societies. Nevertheless, it may be useful to characterise different sources of income as rising stars, cash cows, problematic sources and so on, and to identify key areas of potential growth or loss.

4.2.7 Are our governance and staffing arrangements appropriate to our needs and our aims?

Some societies have realised that their governance and staffing structures need to be modified in the light of changing circumstances, or in order to meet their core aims:

- ❑ key officers and staff may change too often, or not often enough;
- ❑ governing boards and councils may not have effective control;

- those running the society's affairs may become out of touch with the members, who may thus feel disenfranchised; or

- election procedures may not generate a board of trustees who have the necessary combination of skills and experience.

Some societies have therefore thought hard about:

- the key characteristics they need in both their voluntary officers and their staff in order to meet their strategic objectives;

- the structures and allocation of responsibilities between officers and staff.; and

- the periods of office for both officers and members of the governing body, where there appears to be a consensus that a term of office of less than three years for a President or Chair is likely to imply that any fundamental change in the society may become practicably impossible

In some cases this has meant structuring responsibilities around the interests and capabilities of the officers and staff currently in post. But more generally, a number of societies have concluded that fundamental change in changing administrative and governance arrangements is a strategic priority.

One society, for example, decided as a core part of its strategy to restructure its governance by appointing Vice Presidents who are each responsible for an area of activity corresponding to one of the society's strategic goals, thus establishing a tight link between governance and strategy. Another has Vice Presidents who represent different communities of interest; while yet another has appointed a small executive group of honorary officers in place of a large Council, which now functions as an elected consultative and advisory, rather than an executive body.

Many other societies recognise that reliance on the voluntary efforts of honorary officers - supported perhaps by some administrative staff who lack the executive power to make decisions – effectively limits societies' ambitions and their ability to grow and enhance their activities. As one society put it

> *'we depend on the interests and energy of the different officers, and that has a real impact on our effectiveness in key areas; there is always the risk of loss of momentum'.*

In such circumstances, it is clearly important that honorary officers are appointed who do have the necessary expertise time and energy, but also that they have a clear strategic framework in which to work. The Charity Commission provides guidance on all these points.

5.   Formulating a strategy: processes and procedures

Many societies that have developed strategies have found that the process has been almost as valuable as the strategy itself. The processes, like the strategies, vary according to the nature and size of the society, so there is no template to suit all circumstances. But there are some common features which may help societies when thinking about how best to proceed.

5.1   *Making the decision to start*

The triggers that lead societies to think about starting to develop a strategy may vary, and may depend in particular on whether the society is seeking to renew an existing strategy or to develop one for the first time.

 Sometimes it is the election of a new President, or the appointment of a new member of staff (particularly a CEO), with an interest in strategic planning, and the drive to pursue it. In other cases it is simply a recognition that an existing strategy has run its course and needs to be revisited and renewed, or a response to demands from members for new activities. But some societies have decided on the need for a strategy in response to a crisis, which may be financial, or administrative and operational (when, for example staff are overwhelmed, or a key activity fails to meet expectations), or when there is a significant fall in membership, or a merger. Yet other strategic exercises have been stimulated when a group of members have raised concerns about the direction of a society, and those concerns have resonated sufficiently with the membership at large for key people to be elected to positions of power within the society.

Different triggers of this kind may have an influence on the way in which the exercise is undertaken: who leads it, how long it takes, and who is actively involved or consulted. But in nearly all cases, the process has been initiated by discussions at a special meeting of the Council or Board, sometimes at an awayday, focused on possible strategic directions for the society and leading to a decision on how the process should be run.

5.2   *Processes: active involvement and consultations.*

For many small societies, the special meeting of the Council or Board may be the key event, with follow-up largely undertaken in the normal business of meetings and consultations with members. But for other societies, a more extended process will be appropriate, with the appointment of individuals and groups to take the lead.

Who leads: officers, staff and working groups

In some cases lead responsibility will rest with the President or Chair of the Board, or another senior officer; in other cases the process will be driven by the Director, CEO or other senior member of staff. But typically, it will involve the appointment of, as one society puts it

> '*a small committee of the committed, the great and the good',* or

> '*working groups for each key area, chaired by a trustee and supported by a senior member of staff'*

If the process does involve different working groups, the senior officer or member of staff will have to take responsibility for driving the process as a whole, and for ensuring that what emerges from them is stitched together coherently before the strategy is finalised for approval by the governing Council or Board.

External facilitators or advisers

Facilitators and /or expert advisors external to the society have sometimes been used, and can prove valuable, particularly if they have experience of other learned societies or similar organisations. Opinions vary, but some societies that have not sought external input in the past now think that it might be useful to do so in the future, perhaps on specific issues such as governance or resource allocation. But it is also important that externals should not play too prominent or decisive a role, since the strategy needs to be owned by the society itself.

Consultation with members, staff and trustees

Societies that have recently developed strategies all stress the importance of wide consultation with members, staff, and all trustees, and therefore discussions with key committees or special interest groups. Longer processes may involve successive stages of engagement with members, sections, key stakeholders and so on. But even in shorter processes, widespread consultation will be important. Societies almost invariably say that in the future they will seek further consultation and engagement as a key part of the process.

> *'the membership must be brought closer into the process of constructing the strategy'*

> *'involve as many people and stakeholders as possible from the beginning[and} ensure staff have real engagement with the process, as they will need to carry out most of the work'*

> *'make sure you take everyone with you by including all staff, trustees, and members in the process by as many appropriate mechanisms that you need: workshops, online surveys, targeted emails and so on'*

> *'providing opportunities for others to have their say and recognizing those voices along the way will mean your plans are better informed, understood, accepted and appreciated'*

Consultation does not mean, of course, that everyone's wants can be met. Decisions do have to be made about the society's direction and focus, and about priorities. More than one society has learned the hard way that generating a strategy that is highly-inclusive, but amount to a wish-list with aims and objectives so numerous and ambitious that they cannot be met, means that the exercise has produced no useful result. On the other hand, thinking hard about different views and interests, and how to be as inclusive as possible, generates buy-in and shared ownership.

> *'be prepared for lots of discussion and make sure that it's properly managed, focused, and channelled towards a conclusion'*

> *'it's hard work trying to incorporate many different views, but the end result is worth it'*

Length of the process

How much of all this can be done depends on the time and other resources available to support the exercise. Many societies stress the importance of not rushing, and some say that they would extend the process next time if possible. Of the larger societies we spoke to, many suggested that they had taken about a year on their most recent exercise. But other smaller societies stress the need for realism about what can be achieved within the time and other resources available, while one society suggest as a key lesson

> *'not to spend too much time doing it and not to get too caught up in formal strategic planning processes*

6.   Determining the strategy

Some examples of strategies and plans are at Section 6.1. It can be useful to examine these and other models, so that you are not starting from scratch. But it's also crucial that your plan should fit your society's core purposes and circumstances: there is no one model that fits all.

Drafting the strategy involves hard thinking about the kinds of questions we have set out in Section 4 of this guidance, and in particular about the society's core mission and principles, aims and objectives. The important point here is to keep them simple. The documents prepared during the process to create a strategy, and also the plan itself may be lengthy; but one society suggested that

> '*if you can't get the core of your strategy down on two sides of A4 you're not thinking clearly enough'*

It can sometimes be difficult to achieve he right level of detail and specificity: too much and you risk losing clarity, too little and the strategy loses its value as a guide for action and a tool for monitoring the society's effectiveness. Published strategies and plans may be more succinct than fuller versions that are used for internal purposes; but it's important to stress that a strategy is much more than a mission statement. It must at the very least set out some clear goals or aims, and what will be done in order to meet them.

Opinions differ on the extent to which strategic plans should go beyond priorities, aims and objectives to include specific or quantified targets. Some suggest that without such targets, the strategy lacks substance; but others suggest that specific targets are best set annually, in the form of operational and financial plans developed in the light of changing circumstances. Whatever form the strategy takes, it must at the least provide a basis on which business, financial and operational plans can be built, as appropriate the society's nature and scale.

Consultation and hard thinking are both essential. One society suggests

> '*try to avoid getting hung up on words.....The CEO and the President have to have a vision of where to take the society. That's the key point'*

But unless that vision is seen to have resulted from a process that takes proper account of the interests and needs of different stakeholder groups, and speaks to those interests, the strategy runs the risks of generating tension, and in the end of being set aside because it does not provide an effective framework for decision-making.

6.1 Some examples of society strategies

Here are some examples of the strategic plans of a small selection of societies, with markedly different profiles, which are freely available on the web. They are in no sense presented as exemplars. Indeed, you may find it helpful to consider the significant differences between them, and the varying approaches to strategy and planning that they embody.

Royal Statistical Society: Strategic Plan 2014-18

Association for Learning Technology: Strategy 2014-17.

Association of Art Historians: Organisational Aims 2012-2016

British Educational Research Association: Strategic Plan 2012

Institute of Conservation: Strategic Plan 2012-2016

Regional Studies Association: Development Plan 2015-2020

7. Implementing the strategy

There are many examples of strategies that have achieved little more than sitting on a shelf, with little or no reference made to them by officers, trustees, staff or members. But strategy is properly thought of as a process and way of thinking that permeates throughout the society's work and its people. If a strategy is not widely understood and endorsed, and regularly consulted, used, reviewed and monitored, it is not working. Some society Presidents and Chief Executives keep a short version of the strategy to hand at all times, and consult it regularly as an aid to decision-making.

> *'production of the strategic plan is only the start, not the end of the process'*

If a strategy is to become real and embedded in the society, a number of things need to happen. First and foremost, the strategy must be owned by the senior officers and staff, and there must be a clear allocation of responsibilities in taking action to meet the goals or aims set out in the strategy. But beyond that, other issues will need to be addressed in order to guard against the risk of failure in implementing the plan.

7.1 Communicating the strategy

While strategies must be owned above all by the trustees and senior officers of the society, it is also critically important too that they must be effectively communicated to all members, staff, and key stakeholder groups. The aim should be that as many as possible of all those groups get a clear sense of

- ❑   the society's core purposes and direction,

- ❑   how the activities they are involved in contribute to those purposes and direction, and

- ❑   how decisions about those activities fit into a wider framework.

The key benefits of the strategy will be lost unless both the strategy itself, and progress towards key goals, are regularly communicated to all these groups. Strategies that are referred to only by officers, trustees and senior staff will not realise their full potential. Thus one society among several found from a recent survey that members do not know - but would like to know - about its strategic plan and how the work-plans and programmes of activity relate to it. It has therefore decided to devote greater efforts to communicating with members about how the plan translates into activity programmes that are delivering against the society's strategic objectives. Such communications can usefully go beyond the membership to key external stakeholders, and thus help to enhance the society's profile.

7.2. Embedding strategies in work-plans and budgets

If strategies are to become realities, it needs to be made clear who is going to do what, with what resources, and by when. This may involve, as we noted in Section 4.2.7, changes to governance and staffing structures, with clear responsibilities assigned to key individuals and groups among the society's officers and staff. In most cases, it will also usually involve the preparation of financial plans and budgets, business or operational plans, and annual work or activity plans for the society, and objectives for members of staff. In the absence of such plans, it will be difficult if not impossible to achieve the goals set out in the strategy.

> *'we haven't developed a business plan, so we haven't been using the strategic plan effectively'*

> *'don't stop at the writing of the strategic plan. Make sure that you write a business plan alongside it to ensure delivery'*

Some societies have therefore adapted their annual plans and budgets so that they align with the goals set out in new strategies.

> *'we align our budgets and our activity plan and annual review to the four strategic goals'*

> '*the strategy forms the overarching framework for activity and operational plans which are used on a daily basis*'

> '*the main benefit has been in terms of the budget and getting the allocations into the key streams of work*'.

Alignment of this kind can be powerfully-motivating for staff; but it is not always easy, and trustee bodies may not 'live' the strategy in the same way as staff. A few societies, however, seek to go further and to use the goals set out in the strategy as the structure for the regular business of the Council or Board, so that there is clear linkage between the governing body's discussions and the society's overall strategic direction.

Flexibility within overall direction

Nevertheless, it is important that the strategy should not become a straitjacket, and that the society and its officers should retain enough flexibility to enable them to exploit new opportunities or respond to unforeseen changes in circumstances while retaining overall strategic direction. As one society put it, *it's important to remain bold within that overall direction*.

7.3   Monitoring and reviewing progress

Neither strategies nor annual plans are likely to be effective unless progress is regularly reviewed by senior staff and governing bodies. Many societies undertake annual reviews of progress and achievements, while some make such monitoring a standard item of business for each meeting of the governing body. This may involve the creation and monitoring of key performance indicators (KPIs), though the utility of such approaches depends on the nature and size of the society. But regular review is essential if the strategy is become reality:

> '*regular monitoring is critical to embedding the strategy in the life of the society, so that it becomes fundamental to everything we do*'

And in addition to such regular monitoring, many societies have found it useful to conduct a mid-term review of a four-or-five-year strategy to ensure that key goals are likely to be met, and overall direction sustained; and that the strategy remains fit for purpose.

8. Case Studies of change and development

Restructuring the Board to align to the strategy
Hetan Shah, Royal Statistical Society

Launching an open access journal
Sally Hardy, Regional Studies Association

Widening the skills base on the Board
Alison Richmond, Institute of Conservation

Merger as a way of reaching new audiences (education)
Judith Mudd, British Sociological Association

All case studies are available to view at: http://learnedsocietystrategies.org/case-studies/

9. About the learned societies' strategies project

This project has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). It has been led by Dr Rita Gardner, Director of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) and Dr Michael Jubb, Director of the Research Information Network (RIN). Our aim has been to share good practice and to support learned societies in the humanities and social sciences as they seek to develop and implement strategies to sustain and enhance their activities and services for the future.

In order to fulfil that aim, we have In order to fulfil that aim, we have through desk research, a focus group, an online survey, and detailed interviews

❑ built up a detailed picture of the range of learned societies in the humanities and social sciences in the UK, their activities, finances, and modes of operation; and.

❑ examined their current approaches – as well as barriers - to the development of strategies and plans; and assessed potential risks to their activities and services, as well as opportunities to respond and adapt to changing circumstances.

We have sought active engagement with learned societies throughout the project, and we are particularly grateful to those which have provided us with detailed information in the form of interviews and case studies. In drawing up this guidance we have drawn on all the information we have gathered in the course of the project, but we have identified individual societies only where the information is in the public domain via their websites, or otherwise with their express permission.

A full account of our methodology and our findings is available in our final report to our funders. We recognise, of course, that only a minority of societies have been through a process to determine a strategy. We document in the report the numbers and characteristics of those that do and do not have written strategies and plans. We also identify the lessons that the societies that do have written strategies have learned during the processes of determining and implementing their latest strategy; and some of the reasons why those societies that do not have a strategy have not embarked on the process.

This guidance will remain live at http://learnedsocietystrategies.org, hosted by the Royal Geographical Society, until December 2018. If you have any suggestions as to additions or amendments to it, please contact learnedsocietystrategies@rgs.org