



Media, Communications &
Cultural Studies Association

BAFTSS^{g.org}

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
20 Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

10 July 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Strategic Priorities Grant guidance for 2026-27 and the removal of funding for Price Groups C1.1 and C1.2

We are writing on behalf of the Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association (MeCCSA) and the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies (BAFTSS), the UK's national subject associations for media, communication, cultural, film and screen studies in higher education, to register our deep concern at the guidance issued to the Office for Students on 6 July setting out Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG) funding priorities for 2026-27.

This is not the first time we have written to you on this subject. In May last year, following the guidance that reprioritised high-cost subject funding away from media studies, journalism, publishing and information services courses, MeCCSA wrote to you directly and to the then Interim Chair of the OfS, Sir David Behan, setting out our concerns and requesting a formal consultation on the methodology used to reallocate funding. We were grateful to receive replies, from the Minister for Skills on 12 June 2025 and from Sir David on 5 June 2025, both of which recognised media studies, journalism, publishing and information studies as important and valued subjects, and both of which pointed to a forthcoming reform of the SPG as an opportunity to address our concerns.

It is in that context that we read this year's guidance with such surprise. Rather than the promised reform addressing the narrower, targeted reprioritisation of 2025-26, this year's letter removes strategic funding from Price Group C1.1 (nursing, computing, and history courses) and Price Group C1.2 (creative arts, performing arts, archeology, and geography courses) in their entirety. What was, last year, the singling out of named disciplines within one price group has become the wholesale withdrawal of strategic investment from two.

We recognise the government's wish to direct strategic investment towards Price Groups A and B, and we do not dispute the case for protecting funding for medicine, dentistry, veterinary science,

chemistry and engineering. We would, however, ask you to reconsider the logic that treats materially higher delivery costs as a justification confined to Groups A and B alone. Media, communication, cultural, film and screen studies are themselves high-cost to deliver: they depend on specialist studios, production and broadcast equipment, industry-standard software, and small-group and practice-based teaching that a standard classroom-based subject does not require. Removing all strategic funding from Category C, while maintaining it in cash terms for Groups A and B, does not reflect a considered assessment of delivery cost. It reflects an assumption that only STEM and clinical subjects are expensive to teach, which is not the case.

We must also press the point we raised last year about consultation. In our letter to the OfS in May 2025, we specifically asked for formal consultation on the methodology used to reprioritise funding, and the OfS's reply told us it would welcome our involvement and would consult formally on its review of the SPG in due course. We note that the OfS's own announcement this month confirms that a wider consultation on the future approach to the SPG will indeed take place, but only later this year, and only in respect of funding from 2027-28 onwards. This year's far larger reduction, covering the whole of C1.1 and C1.2, has once again been decided and implemented, to our knowledge, without any prior engagement with the subject associations, learned societies or institutions affected. We called for meaningful consultation last year. It has still not happened, and the scale of what has been decided without it has grown. This sits uneasily against your own commitment, on taking office, that the government wanted to work in partnership with everyone involved in the higher education sector. A decision of this scale, taken about disciplines that MeCCSA and BAFTSS represent, without any consultation with those who teach and research them, is difficult to reconcile with that commitment.

This decision also sits uneasily alongside the government's own Industrial Strategy. The creative industries are named as one of the eight priority growth sectors in Invest 2035, worth in the region of £125 billion a year to the economy, with the Creative Industries Sector Plan setting out an ambition to close to double business investment in the sector by 2035. Yet the sector already faces an acute and worsening skills shortage: 65 per cent of hard-to-fill vacancies in the creative industries are attributable to skills shortages, compared with 41 per cent across all sectors, and this is most pronounced in higher-skilled roles. Withdrawing strategic teaching investment from the creative arts, performing arts and the wider media and communication disciplines that supply this pipeline is not a neutral fiscal choice. It works directly against a growth sector that this government has itself identified as a priority. We were not alone in noting this contradiction. Vanessa Wilson, Chief Executive of University Alliance, called it "a decision that flies in the face of the government's own industrial strategy," and warned that cutting nursing, computing and the creative arts together risks lasting damage to the talent pipeline on which our public services, economy and future prosperity depend.

Finally, we would ask you to consider the timing and cumulative effect of this decision. The sector is facing a financial situation without precedent, and while the sums allocated per student through the SPG may appear modest in isolation, they cannot be viewed in isolation. Category C funding has already been reduced twice in recent years: first through the initial split of the old high-cost subject category into C1.1 and C1.2, and then through the narrower reprioritisation announced last year. This year's guidance removes what remains of it entirely. The British Academy has already documented how financial pressure across the sector is producing subject 'cold spots', regions where students no longer have access within a commutable distance to whole fields of study, with the greatest impact falling on students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are most likely to study close to home. A further reduction of this kind, layered on top of the pressures already driving that trend, risks widening those cold spots still further and narrowing choice and opportunity for students right across the country.

We urge you to reconsider and reverse the removal of strategic funding from Price Groups C1.1 and C1.2, and to launch, without further delay, a genuine engagement exercise on how the available SPG budget should be prioritised. MeCCSA and BAFTSS are ready to provide evidence on delivery costs, skills shortages and sector impact to inform a fairer methodology, and remain ready to work with the Department for Education and the Office for Students to develop a sustainable and fair approach to strategic funding allocations for high-cost subjects.

We welcome the opportunity for MeCCSA and BAFTSS, as two national subject associations directly affected by this decision, to meet with DfE and OfS officials in the coming weeks, ahead of any further decisions affecting the 2026-27 or 2027-28 funding cycles.

Yours sincerely,



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