

# FALLING WALLS SCIENCE SUMMIT



## KEY RESULTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

### “EVIDENCE & PUBLIC DISCOURSE: ACADEMIA’S ROLE IN DEMOCRACY”

— *How academia can reinforce democratic resilience amid rising distrust and disinformation.*

When everyone has an opinion and facts are “optional”, democracy is in trouble. This panel argued that universities, researchers and think tanks are not a luxury – they are core democratic infrastructure. Their job is to defend standards of evidence, model open debate and equip citizens to navigate a noisy, polarised information environment.

The speakers warned that trust in institutions is eroding, universities are pulled into culture wars and funding is being cut, especially for the humanities and social sciences, which are essential for historical understanding and civic literacy. At the same time, both public and private funders risk steering research towards short-term political agendas. The panel called for academia to stop apologising for itself, show how it underpins jobs, innovation and social cohesion, and insist on the space and resources needed to speak truth to power.

### THE PANEL CALL TO ACTION:

#### 1 — Reassert academic integrity and democratic value.

Make clear the difference between opinion and research-based knowledge, and teach critical reading, thinking and argumentation as core democratic skills.

#### 2 — Protect open, plural debate on campus.

Safeguard academic freedom and free speech while insisting that contributions meet basic standards of evidence and argument, not mere provocation.

#### 3 — Engage society with clarity and purpose.

Train and support academics to communicate clearly with media, policymakers and the public, and involve practitioners early when shaping research questions.

#### 4 — Assert academia’s value with confidence.

Explain how universities educate future citizens, support local economies and strengthen democratic resilience and hold policymakers to account for protecting this role.

#### 5 — Secure funding that safeguards independence.

Resist cuts, argue for sustained investment across all disciplines, and accept private or philanthropic support only with clear safeguards for academic freedom.

*This expert panel is supported by the Alfred Landecker Foundation and assembled in the framework of the Falling Walls Science Summit 2025 in Berlin. The Falling Walls Science Summit is a leading international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral forum for scientific breakthroughs. It commemorates the fall of the Berlin Wall and promotes dialogue between science and society.*



### PANELLISTS

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Chair-Professor, University of Cologne

**Andrew Thompson**  
Professor, Nuffield College

**Silke Mülherr**  
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