


Universities UK

The essential voice for our universities

11 December 2007

The Rt. Hon. John Denham MP
Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills
Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
1 Victoria St
London
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Funding for Science

I am writing to express UUK's growing concern over problems relating to the funding of the Science and Technology Facilities Council.

UUK have welcomed the headline investment for science announced in the recent CSR. Indeed, we are encouraged by the government's strong commitment to science and innovation and the strategic approach taken within the 10-year science and innovation framework. Much of the additional funding provided in this and previous spending reviews has been provided to meet more of the full economic costs of projects undertaken in universities. UUK are strong supporters of this agenda and believe that this commitment will help secure a strong and sustainable research base in universities.

The headline investment for STFC in the 2007 CSR was 14%. I understand, however, that in reality this will represent a significant reduction in funding over this spending period due to a number of factors. We do of course appreciate that the circumstances that have led to this situation are complex, and compounded by the fact that that the STFC was only created in April this year.

The impact will be significant, particularly in physics departments within universities. We have taken informal soundings of UUK members on the potential impact of scaling back of STFC funding over the current CSR period. We will be undertaking further analysis of the information provided, but the headline messages are:

Chief Executive **Baroness Warwick**

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- There would be a significant loss of staff at all levels, impacting on the health of physics departments and research environment.
- Cuts would place at risk the successful outcome of work where the UK already has an established lead. UK institutions would therefore lose leadership in world-leading projects and lose international collaborative partners.
- Recruitment and retention of high-calibre researchers of international standing will be much harder.
- Collaboration at regional and national levels (for example, research pooling in Scotland) would be damaged.
- Institutional investment in staff and equipment would not be fully exploited and facilities would become run-down.
- Any negative publicity about the viability of Physics departments would also have knock on effect on student recruitment into degree programmes.
- Any reduction could also have potentially negative effects on the regional economy, for example impacting on the supply chain for instrumentation.
- There will also be a considerable impact in parts of Chemistry, Biology, and Engineering.

It is clear that this situation was not intended, but given its seriousness it is crucial that we can now move swiftly to resolve it. This will require flexibility of approach and an open dialogue between STFC and DIUS. We would urge the setting up of an independent review to assist this process. This will need to be done as speedily as possible so that the problem can be resolved in, say, 3 months to limit any period of uncertainty. At the very least, funding should be found to provide a sensible period for adjustment before any abrupt decisions have to be taken. During that period the future trajectory of existing programmes should be re-calibrated, and future ambitions modified.

Please do contact me if UUK can be of any further assistance in the process.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Diana Warwick', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Diana Warwick