



CaSE PR 05/07

### **Universities will still be short of cash, so serious reform is needed**

The Campaign for Science & Engineering today welcomed the House of Commons' report on providing science courses in universities, and urged the party leaders to make funding reforms a priority in the next Parliament.

*"The Prime Minister and Chancellor keep saying they want the UK to be the best place in the world for science, but we keep reading about university science departments closing," said Dr Peter Cotgreave, Director of CaSE. "It doesn't seem to make sense. As the House of Commons science committee points out, the country needs science graduates, and we cannot afford to keep losing capacity willy-nilly."*

"CaSE agrees with the committee that there is no point just going on about how much more public money we need. Taxpayers' cash is a finite resource, and the public purse is not suddenly going to find the billions of pounds needed to fund what the universities are expected to do.

"So we need to look at other ways of bringing in new money, and at making the resources we already have work harder.

"To do that, we need to make the funding mechanisms more conducive to collaboration and sharing, instead of making everything a fierce competition, with universities pitted against each other all the time. If collaboration were rewarded, one university that happened to have a particular piece of expensive laboratory equipment might go the effort of making it available to students from other institutions.

"At the moment, the only way of gaining extra investment is for a university to do well in a crazy bureaucratic process called the Research Assessment Exercise; all it does is measure how similar an institution is to the big research-led university. It does nothing for the huge diversity of universities that concentrate on technical training, on commercialising research or on helping local businesses.

"And after the election, whoever wins power has to put a stop to crazy Government actions based on nothing but a whim, like the decision to increase funding for arts and humanities students much, much more than that for science and engineering students, even though it's the science departments that are closing because of lack of money.

"Politicians also need to consider whether the current cap on top-up fees is in everyone's best interests, or whether it might be better to lift it; at least that might deliver much-needed new money into the system."