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CaSE Chairman urges Government to deliver on recent commitments

Campaign for Science & Engineering (CaSE) will today challenge the Government to resolve the immediate crisis in funding for university science departments, by delivering on ministers' recent commitments to make the UK one of the best places in the world for science and engineering.

In his final report to CaSE members after ten years as Chairman, Professor Richard Joyner will say that he was astonished by the decision two years ago to reduce the proportion of available university funding that was devoted to teaching science and engineering.

"It is no wonder you can hardly pick up the newspapers these days without reading that another university is planning to close a science or engineering department. A Parliamentary debate last week highlighted the fact that about 19 physics and 10 chemistry departments have closed across England and Wales since 1997.

"CaSE has been at the forefront of the campaign to get this crazy decision reversed, and in the past few weeks, we have seen some change in emphasis in what the Government is saying.

"Now is the time for the problem to be put right, before it is too late for the many other university science departments that are under severe financial pressures.

"The Science Minister, Lord Sainsbury, admitted a couple of weeks ago that a science department 'will not survive' on the money it receives for teaching students.

"And the Higher Education Minister, Bill Rammell, says he recognises that there are issues to be resolved with the unsatisfactory funding formula

"Just last week, the Prime Minister told CaSE that the closure of chemistry and physics departments was a cause for concern, and that his Government was looking again at the funding package."

Professor Joyner said that, after consulting CaSE's members at this evening's AGM, he would be writing to Mr Rammell urging him to set out how he intended to deliver on the Prime Minister's commitment in time to save more science departments.

"Next year's Comprehensive Spending Review provides the ideal opportunity to get this sorted once and for all," he added, "It can be addressed in time to implement the new funding package before the start of the next academic year next September.

"Then the science community can get on with teaching the next generation of scientists, engineers and mathematicians the economy needs, instead of worrying about staying solvent."

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