

Government signals support for science and engineering

20th October 2010

Commenting on the 10% real terms cut to the science budget over four years, Director of the Campaign for Science and Engineering, Imran Khan, said:

“By offering relative protection for research from cuts, maintaining a ring-fence for the science budget, and promising to increase medical research funding from the MRC and Department for Health in real terms, the government has signalled a desire to support science and engineering.”

“A 10% cut over four years is significant, especially at a time when our competitors like the US and Germany are having real-terms increases – but today saw an important ‘statement of intent’ from the coalition.”

“Important questions remain over the details of some of the funding plans - particularly over capital expenditure for Research Councils and universities, funding for the Technology Strategy Board, and the status of R&D tax credits. But the scientific and engineering community will now look forward to engaging constructively with the government on how to put research at the heart of the UK’s growth agenda.”

CaSE highlights the following details resulting from today’s announcements:

- Out of the core £3.5bn ‘science budget’, not including spending on research by universities, £2.75bn has been preserved for next year. The rest makes up ‘capital expenditure’. That part has not yet been confirmed and we are expecting announcements in the forthcoming weeks. This is a particular concern for STFC; to see their expenditure broken down by near-cash and capital, see here: <http://www.stfc.ac.uk/resources/pdf/STFCCurrentBudget.pdf>
- The Ministry of Defence spends over £2bn a year on research and development. It is not clear how far this will be affected by cuts at this department, but it forms an important part of the UK research landscape.
- The Department for Health spends over £700m a year on research and development. This forms over half of the non-MoD Whitehall expenditure on research and development. The Chancellor announced that this will be protected in real terms.
- CaSE believes that departmental research should be protected but can also be made more efficient generally. CaSE Director Imran Khan said: “To build on today’s announcements, the government should find a way to maximise the impact of departmental research spending and procurement in order to stimulate our science and engineering base.”
- The Spending Review details that the Medical Research Council budget will increase in real terms. If the total science budget is frozen in cash terms, this is likely to mean that all the other research councils face falling budgets in cash and real terms.
- The details of how the science budget will be allocated to different fields of research and projects will be being worked out by BIS over the coming weeks and months.

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