Autumn Budget 2026: Representation from CaSE

Summary: Priority policy asks

Protect curiosity-driven research

- **Continue to protect curiosity-driven research funding by sustaining, at a minimum, inflation-match increases year on year**. This should include protecting the real terms value of quality related (QR) funding and its equivalents in the devolved administrations, allowing institutions to respond strategically to emerging challenges and sustain research excellence across disciplines.
- **Provide clarity on responsibility for overseeing and maintaining UK R&D capacity and capability.**

Attract and retain global R&D talent

- **Reduce the upfront cost of visas, including the immigration health surcharge,** so that they are competitive with comparable nations.
- **Maintain the Global Talent Taskforce and Global Talent Fund** to continue to signal that the UK is an attractive place for the brightest and best researchers.
- **Maintain the fast-track route to ILR for Global Talent visa holders and their family members,** to ensure this visa route remains globally competitive.

Support regional R&D

- **Maintain coordination between local, regional and national funding for R&D.** This includes maintaining funding for excellence-led, curiosity-led research at a UK level even as the Government devolves greater responsibility for later-stage innovation to local and regional authorities.
- **Ensure that funding supports an environment for R&D that is collaborative rather than competitive between regions**.
- **Provide long-term and flexible regional funding support** to incentivise international investment and sustain newly built capacity, skills, collaborations, and culture shifts.

About CaSE

Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) is the leading independent voice for UK research and development (R&D).

We are a charity supported by a diverse membership including businesses, universities, professional bodies, research charities and individuals. Our members span the whole breadth of R&D – including discovery research, science, engineering, and innovation across the public, private, and charitable sectors.

We collaborate with our members, partners and the public to lend our clear, expert voice to decisions about research and development. We specialise in developing non-partisan, responsive solutions that help research and innovation to thrive in ways that improve people's lives and livelihoods.

Introduction

Supporting UK R&D is an essential way to generate growth and jobs, ensure excellence in UK universities and research organisations, stimulate private sector innovation and improve lives and livelihoods in every postcode. To achieve this, Government commitment to stable funding and investment in R&D must remain unchanged. It is therefore positive that the UK R&D budget is being protected in tough fiscal circumstances, with the commitment to spend £22.6 billion on R&D by 2029/30 welcome. It's important that the Government continues this positive trajectory to signal to globally mobile private businesses and investors that UK R&D is a strong, reliable destination for investment. This includes supporting the foundations of the R&D system by protecting curiosity-led research, building R&D capacity across all regions and nations of the UK and ensuring the world's brightest and best can come and work here.

Protect curiosity-driven research

The UK R&D system is made up of a wide range of institutions that fund and conduct R&D, from fundamental discovery or curiosity-driven research to translational, applied or commercial R&D. The UK Government will need to invest in and draw from all types of research to capitalise on the economic growth and societal benefits R&D can provide.

Our evidence from across the R&D sector emphasises that it is often the serendipitous discoveries arising from non-targeted discovery research that form the foundation of the most economically and socially beneficial advances and innovations.[1]

[1] Mission Critical R&D, CaSE (2025)

In addition to supporting excellence and the delivery of government priorities, the diversity and breadth of the research base contribute to national capability. Discovery research creates the skills, infrastructure and ideas that underpin the dynamic environment in which all UK R&D thrives. Moreover, the UK needs to retain a strong foundation of basic research to be ready for unanticipated future challenges, as we saw in the vaccine response needed for the COVID-19 pandemic.

We also know that the UK public want to see an equal balance of discovery and applied research. CaSE's 2025 public opinion research found that half of people favoured an even mix of fundamental and applied research.[2]

With the science and innovation portfolio moving into the new, larger Department for Business Innovation Science and Trade, it is vital to continue to protect and invest in curiosity-driven and discovery research.[3] It is also important to ensure that the practicalities of making changes in Whitehall aren't allowed to take away from the time and resources needed to support the R&D sector.

CaSE welcomes UKRI's plans to invest £14.5 billion in curiosity-driven, foundational research over the spending review period[4] and its commitment to supporting and sustaining investment in discovery and curiosity-driven research, growing as the economy allows.[5]

Universities and independent research organisations (IROs) in the UK carry out most of the publicly funded research taking place in the UK.[6] Member survey data from Universities UK and Association of Research Managers and Administrators shows that R&D activity in UK universities is already being eroded due to sustained financial pressures.[7] TRAC data already shows that the full economic cost (FEC) of research is not met by research income, and it is clear that the real terms value of quality-related (QR) funding has fallen over the past decade. [8] The combination of the financial

[2] CaSE's Public Attitudes to R&D 2025, CaSE (2025)
[3] What does the new Government mean for R&D? , CaSE (2026)
[4] https://www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/analysis-and-publications/detail/case-looks-at-the-governments-new-framework-for-public-rd-investment/
[5] https://www.ukri.org/publications/uk-research-and-innovation-strategy-2026-to-2031/ukri-strategy-2026-to-2031/
[6] Gross domestic expenditure on research and development, UK: 2024, ONS, 2026
[7] https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/research-risk-impacts-financial

(ARMA Financial sustainability of research: Themes and recommendations from ARMA workshops) https://arma.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/ARMA-Financial-sustainability-of-research-report.pdf
[8] Research at risk: impacts of financial constraints on UK universities, UUK, ARMA, CaSE (2025)

pressures on universities combined with UKRI's funding changes could result in a loss of capability in some areas of underpinning research.

Therefore, supporting these vital institutions in achieving a sustainable financial footing and maintaining their research-intensity must be a central part of any plans for the R&D sector under BIST. Furthermore, it is important to ensure clarity on responsibility for monitoring the disciplinary health and capability of the UK research base. There is a current risk that this responsibility falls through the cracks between departments and that the UK unintentionally loses critical national capabilities.

To maintain curiosity-driven research's vital contribution to the UK, we urge the UK Government to:

- **Continue to protect curiosity-driven research funding by sustaining, at a minimum, inflation-match increases year on year**. This should include protecting the real terms value of quality related (QR) funding and its equivalents in the devolved administrations, allowing institutions to respond strategically to emerging challenges and sustain research excellence across disciplines.
- **Provide clarity on responsibility for overseeing and maintaining UK R&D capacity and capability.**

Attract and retain global R&D talent

International collaboration and relationships are fundamental to having a strong R&D sector in the UK. This includes participation in international programmes and the flow of talent to and from the UK.

International research talent, alongside our skilled domestic workforce, is crucial for the UK to maintain a world-leading R&D sector. CaSE members have told us that it is important for UK institutions to attract the highest possible level of talent to maintain their positions as world leaders. International researchers are essential to stay on the cutting edge and some specialist organisations said that they face challenges in recruiting enough top-quality staff from the UK to maintain this position.[9]

[9] Barriers in the visa system for UK R&D organisations, CaSE (2025)

CaSE public opinion research shows that people in the UK think employing international researchers can diversify ideas and culture, improve the UK economy, increase international collaboration and strengthen the quality of UK R&D.[10]

There has been promising recognition of the value of international research talent in the recent widening of the UK's Global Talent visa and the launching of the Global Talent Taskforce and Global Talent Fund. These have provided an important step in signalling that the UK is an attractive and accessible place for the brightest and best researchers from around the world. Maintaining these initiatives will strengthen the UK's ability to compete on the global skills market, especially given the political shift in the opposite direction in the USA.

However, despite these positive developments, visa policy continues to pose barriers to attracting international talent to work in the UK.[11] In particular, high visa costs can be a decisive barrier – they are a significant disincentive and can make or break leading researchers' decisions to come to the UK. High visa costs also represent an increasingly significant cost for organisations and can be unsustainable for organisations to support.

Furthermore, the Government's recent proposals on changes to indefinite leave to remain (ILR) risk making the UK less competitive. Changes to the ILR threshold for skilled worker visas are likely to make the UK less attractive to incoming researchers partly due to social benefits like healthcare and childcare only applying after reaching ILR. For those already in the UK on skilled worker visas, the prospect of changes causes anxiety and uncertainty. Extending the ILR threshold would add £6,300 in Immigration Health Surcharge costs, which will be shouldered by UK organisations or by researchers themselves. Globally mobile, talented individuals may choose to leave the UK if the threshold for settlement is raised.

It is welcome that the Government proposes keeping the fast track (3-5 years) route to ILR for holders of Global Talent visas. This is a significant part of what makes this visa attractive. However, settlement thresholds should not be increased for family members – a gap of up to 7 years between a visa holder and family members would be a substantial weakening of this attractive feature.

To attract and retain global R&D talent, CaSE urges the UK Government to:

[10] Public Attitudes to R&D and International Talent, CaSE (2025)

[11] Barriers in the visa system for UK R&D organisations, CaSE (2025)

- **Reduce the upfront cost of visas, including the immigration health surcharge,** so that they are competitive with comparable nations.
- **Maintain the Global Talent Taskforce and Global Talent Fund** to continue to signal that the UK is an attractive place for the brightest and best researchers.
- **Maintain the fast-track route to ILR for Global Talent visa holders and their family members,** to ensure this visa route remains globally competitive.

Support regional R&D

Investing in regional R&D can play a significant role in delivering a more R&D intensive UK and create opportunities for new jobs and industries across all parts of the UK.

CaSE research shows that the public recognises R&D's potential for local impact – 83% could identify advantages from more R&D being in their local area, citing local economic growth, opportunities for young people, and well-paid jobs.[12]

CaSE has long called for greater freedom around regional decision making on R&D, and highlighted the benefits this can bring to both research and local communities. In our report, Backing Business R&D, CaSE recommended that local authorities be empowered to make their own decisions about innovation investment and to drive things forward without excessive oversight from central government.[13] In addition, our Place 2025 briefing offers detailed recommendations for strengthening the UK's regional R&D, including the vital role universities play in local economies.[14]

The Government's recently announced new framework for devolution is a welcome one, promising local leaders greater power and control over many areas, including innovation. However, greater devolution could affect existing structures for R&D funding and support, and it will be important to provide clarity on how devolved innovation funding will work in practice.

Evidence suggests that devolved research funding works best when local, regional and national funding streams play complementary but distinct roles. Local and regional funding is typically most effective when focused on later-stage innovation and economic development, while national funding remains essential for excellence-led, curiosity-driven research. National oversight allows funders to identify and back the strongest research wherever it happens, something that becomes difficult once R&D

[12] https://www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/what-we-do/public-opinion/research/
[13] Backing Business R&D, CaSE (2024)
[14] Place 2025: How R&D can drive growth across the UK, CaSE (2025)

budgets are divided along regional lines. Therefore, strategic national oversight of fundamental research funding will remain critical to ensuring the UK invests effectively and stays internationally competitive.

Furthermore, many local innovation initiatives remain dependent on short-term project funding. For devolution to deliver the greatest value, there is a need to build permanent innovation capacity within places, enabling regions to develop long-term strategies and capabilities rather than relying on individual programmes or competitive funding rounds. Long-term support doesn't need to mean guaranteed funding but should provide efficiency and streamlining for future funding applications.

Regional R&D investment will be most successful if it builds on existing areas of excellence with growth potential. This should recognise and support clusters with potential for cross-sector innovation, as well as clusters with activity exclusively in the same sector. This should build on the Innovation Clusters Mapping Tool created by DSIT. In addition, to maximise the regional economic impact of R&D, it is important to create an environment that is collaborative rather than competitive between regions.

CaSE urges the UK Government to:

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- **Ensure that funding supports an environment for R&D that is collaborative rather than competitive between regions**.
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