

PRESS RELEASE



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Recent science funding decline has harmed scientific research in UK

A study by Science is Vital finds that researchers within the United Kingdom are struggling to maintain competitiveness and effectiveness in the current funding climate

Grassroots campaign group Science is Vital polled researchers on their experiences of performing scientific research since the funding erosion initiated by the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) – the first attempt to find out what is really happening at the coalface. The report, to be delivered today to the Rt Hon. David Willetts MP, the Minister of State for Universities and Science, shows that many scientists at all levels are experiencing more difficulties in carrying out research than they did before the CSR.

Legacy of the 2010 science budget cash freeze was compiled following a survey of 868 researchers across the spectrum of UK science. In collaboration with the British Science Association, a youth focus group of science students also fed into the report, to gauge the mood of the next generation of scientists and engineers.

This exercise uncovered the widespread view that the ability of UK scientists to perform excellent research has been significantly impaired since the 2010 decision, which has led to an overall erosion of the amount of public funds supporting science. Many of our respondents reported, compared to pre-2010 levels:

- A decrease in the number of grants funded
- A decrease in overall money supplied even when grants were funded
- A difficulty in recruiting the necessary staff
- A difficulty in recruiting PhD students
- A difficulty in obtaining necessary equipment or consumables to perform research to modern standards
- A lack of confidence in the trajectory and promise of UK science
- A recognition that some of the UK's competitors are more attractive, in some cases inspiring researchers to leave the UK, or a research career, altogether

Science as Vital warn that if the current funding decline is not soon reversed, we risk seriously damaging our research base, with all the knock-on effects to the economy and to industrial interest that this could induce. They propose two recommendations to redress the situation: to increase the science budget at the next spending review later on this month; and to make a longer-term commitment of scientific support, eventually reaching a level of support comparable to 0.8% of GDP – the current G8 average. This plan has already been robustly backed, in a recent letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, by more than 50 top scientists including seven Nobel laureates, such as Sir Paul Nurse, Sir Andre Geim and Sir Tim Hunt, and a large number of Fellows of the Royal Society. It is also backed by a number of scientific organizations and medical charities, including The Association of Medical Research Charities, Parkinson's UK, the British Science Association, The Biochemical Society, the Campaign for Science and Engineering, and many others.

Colin Blakemore, FMedSci, FRS, Universities of Oxford and London, said:

"The funding of research is a measure of the government's faith in the future. The settlement for science in 2010 was better than predicted but the cuts in real terms are already causing real hardship and are damaging the UK's remarkable international standing in science. George Osborne has frequently signalled his personal belief in the central importance of science in the future of the UK. Now is the time for him to turn that belief into action. A significant increase in the science budget would send a message to our major competitors that the government recognises that science and innovation are the key to the recovery of the UK economy."

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Dr Jennifer Rohn, scientist at University College London and Chair and Founder of Science is Vital, said:

“We were quite frankly surprised by just how much scientists are struggling to cope in the current climate of managed decline in funding. In only three years, significant damage has already been done, and further lack of support will only make things worse. We hope that this report persuades the Government that the science budget should be increased in the upcoming spending review – maintaining the cash freeze will not constitute ‘protection’, but will only perpetuate the decline.”

For more information, contact Science is Vital Chair Dr Jennifer Rohn (jenny@scienceisvital.org.uk / +44 (0) 7984 217748), Vice-chair Professor Stephen Curry (s.curry@imperial.ac.uk / +44 (0) 7986 201707) or Secretary Dr Richard P. Grant (rpgrant@gmail.com +44 (0) 7718 310111).

Notes to Editors

About Science is Vital: Founded in 2010, Science is Vital is a group of concerned scientists, engineers and supporters of science who are campaigning to protect science and research in the UK.

Twitter: @scienceisvital / Web: <http://scienceisvital.org.uk/latest>

The UK has a proud history of excellence in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. We are world leaders in many fields of research. Despite the UK’s relatively small size, it generates more publications and citations per pound spent on research than any other G8 nation. Home to 1% of the global population and 3% of global public spending on science, the UK nonetheless publishes 8% of the world’s papers, and garners 12% of citations. Our world-class research universities and institutes which attract excellence and investment from around the world have made us a global hub for science. Many of our competitors have recognized the importance of investing in science especially in austere times – it could be catastrophic for the UK not to do its utmost to protect our research base.

Founded by Dr Jennifer Rohn, Science is Vital remains a strictly grassroots organization of volunteers: working scientists, ex-scientists and science-friendly nonscientists. The group was publically acknowledged as having played an important role in persuading the Government not to cut the science budget in the 2010 spending review.

If you are writing for the web, please link to the website <http://scienceisvital.org.uk/>