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Rt Hon Vincent Cable
Secretary of State
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
1 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0ET

Friday 29th November 2013

Dear Dr Cable,

We are writing to express our deep concern about reports that the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills is considering cuts to the ring-fenced science funding because of budget pressures arising from changes in the higher education policy in England.

In light of the government's commitment in the [2010 Spending Review](#)¹ to ring-fence the science budget up to 2015, a protection extended to 2016 in this year's interim budget statement, we will consider any attempt to drop this commitment as a broken promise and will oppose it vigorously. This includes any strategy that places further items within the ring fence without increasing the overall budget to compensate.

The possibility of cuts will come as a major disappointment to researchers across the country. They have already [weathered austere times](#)² with a flat cash settlement in 2010 that has [eroded the science budget](#)³ by almost 10% in real terms. With the UK economic outlook now improving, they would be expecting the government soon to be making good on its promise, as George Osborne put it, "[to make the UK the best place in the world to do science](#)"⁴. Instead we are faced with reports of cuts of up to £215m, a breach of the promised ring fence. This is particularly disturbing because

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/investing-in-research-development-and-innovation/supporting-pages/science-and-research-funding>

² <http://scienceisvital.org.uk/2013/06/17/legacy-of-the-2010-science-budget-cash-freeze-final-report/>

³ <http://scienceogram.org/blog/2013/06/spending-review-2013-science-budget/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/speech-by-the-chancellor-of-the-exchequer-rt-hon-george-osborne-mp-to-the-royal-society>

budgetary pressures arising from HE policy changes are confined to England but [may affect researchers throughout the UK](#)⁵.

In addition to harming the scientific infrastructure of the UK in a manner that would be difficult to reverse, reduced funding could have further detrimental effects on the UK R&D and innovation programme which we appreciate the government has been developing. Sudden cuts now for the sake of fixing an unrelated short-term problem could cause far more harm than good.

As you are aware, many of the [UK's top scientists backed our call earlier this year](#)⁶ for the government to demonstrate long-term commitment to funding science and engineering as part of a strategy to boost growth. In 2010 we were able to [rally widespread public support](#)⁷ for UK investment in science from scientists and non-scientists alike, with 35,000 signatures on a petition and a rally outside the Treasury some 2000 strong. We are committed to keeping science and engineering — a jewel in the UK's crown — in the public eye and high up the political agenda throughout the run-up to the next general election.

We fully support the government's oft-stated commitment to UK science and agreed in particular with Prime Minister David Cameron [when he said](#)⁸, “we can be very proud of our past, but we cannot be complacent about our future.” Those commitments need to be backed by concerted action across government to prevent departmental budget fluctuations from harming Britain's reputation as an investor in research. We call on the government to ensure that BIS can find ways to meet its obligations to research by maintaining its promised funding in the short term, and in the long-term, increasing it.

Yours sincerely



Dr Jennifer Rohn
Chair, Science is Vital



Prof. Stephen Curry
Vice-chair, Science is Vital

cc: Rt Hon George Osborne, Rt Hon David Willets, Dr Graeme Reid, and published as an open letter on our website

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2013/nov/28/uk-science-threatened-by-english-policy-failure>

⁶ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/letters/9920713/The-Government-must-increase-funding-for-science-and-engineering-in-order-to-boost-growth.html>

⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2010/oct/20/science-is-vital-result>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-life-sciences-and-opening-up-the-nhs>