

## **The UK Economy and the New Parliament – a statement by the UK Deans of Science**

The new parliament has a once in a lifetime opportunity to re-balance the UK economy to one based on the opportunities offered by science and technology and to reverse the decline in the manufacturing base of the UK. An increase in government spending on science must not be postponed until the economy has recovered and much of the current national debt paid off.

It is always tempting to argue that the UK is at a cross-roads and that the decisions made by the government will be critical to the country's future prosperity. However, any analysis of the effects of the world economic crisis of the past two years and the direction of the UK's economy over the past three decades, confirms that we are now at a pivotal moment. Since 1980, during successive governments, the contribution of manufacturing to the UK's GDP, much of it based on our acknowledged excellence in science and technology, has been in decline. It is now an almost unsustainably small proportion of the country's economic activity. While government investment in science increased over the past decade it is scarcely any higher in real terms than it was in 1980. The EU has set a target of 3% of GDP to be spent on research and development by 2014 but the UK's target is only 2.5% (with a current level 1.8%, significantly less than in 1990) with no sign of any improvement. In the meantime, following the problems in the world's financial sector the US, France, China and many other countries have announced major increases in spending that will undoubtedly ensure that their future economies will reflect a highly successful science and technology base. In the UK however, Research Councils and others are currently expecting major cuts in their ability to fund a successful science and technology base

We call on the new Parliament to support all aspects of the UK's science and manufacturing by actions including:

- creating a major economic stimulus package by increasing public funding of the science base through the Research Councils, the Technology Strategy Board, targeted use of government departmental expenditure and new initiatives
- committing to policies that will ensure that the research and development expenditure will be at least 3% of the UK's GDP before the end of the current Parliament and 5% by 2020
- creating world-leading tax schemes and other incentives for science-based industries to invest in the UK
- ensuring that science policy is at the heart of government by locating the Government Office for Science in the Cabinet Office
- maintaining the post of Chief Scientific Adviser in every Government department including the Treasury
- making the study of science in schools and colleges more attractive to UK pupils through improved science facilities and better training and continuing professional development for science teachers
- increasing the number of science places in universities at undergraduate and postgraduate level
- appropriate funding of science facilities in universities

We earnestly believe that the UK must act now before we lose out to our competitors as they implement their decisions to expand their investment in research and development during very difficult economic times. Any delay will continue the current trend of students increasingly choosing areas such as the performing arts, leaving the UK unable to rise to the serious scientific challenges facing the world – but with a busker on every street corner.

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