Andrew Miller MP  
Chair - Science and Technology Committee  
7 Millbank  
House of Commons  
London SW1P 3JA

24 January 2011

Dear Andrew,

UK Resource Centre for Women in SET

Thank you for your letter of the 10 January 2011 regarding our decision not to renew funding to the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET (UKRC).

As you are no doubt aware, we have had to prioritise our spending for the next comprehensive spending review (CSR) period to achieve maximum effectiveness during an economically difficult time. We believe that to tackle gender and other diversity issues in STEM, we can do this by prioritising equality action in our programmes and with our partners, rather than marginalising the issue within one institution, however well-regarded its remit, or outcomes to date.

To address your points in turn, I think we must first be clear that we have decided not to renew the funding to UKRC at the end of the current CSR period, when their grant expires, rather than cut the funding. All of our partners are aware that grants are for a fixed term with no guarantee that they will be renewed. However, my officials are working with UKRC to build on their experience of developing and promoting such networks over recent years.

To this end, I have recently decided that the Department will offer UKRC £500,000 of ‘transitional funding’, for a period of one year (2011-12). UKRC will be able to use this to facilitate the transfer of their knowledge and experience to other partners, since there are a wide variety of other organisations also active in this area. My officials will work with UKRC to finalise the details of how this funding can be used.

I confirm that it is this Department’s policy to concentrate on mainstreaming diversity in STEM. We have asked the Royal Academy of Engineering to lead on developing a new diversity programme that focuses on engineering, and the wider STEM community, in partnership with engineering institutions, industry and others. We would expect that all of our partners would support diversity objectives where they can from existing resources.
The target audience of UKRC represents only one point in the career ‘journey’ of individuals, and deals with only one diversity group. It is important to recognise that diversity has several elements not simply gender. We consider that programmes which tackle perceived shortages in the STEM pipeline must be prioritised because these provide the scientists and engineers of the future. By encouraging more girls to choose STEM subjects at GCSE and A Level, we will create a larger pool on which all sectors – industry, academia, education, the wider public sector and so on - can draw, in the future. The Government has complied with its legal requirements to assess the impact of non-renewal of UKRC’s funding.

This decision was part of the wider science and research allocation, on which the following bodies provided advice:

The Royal Society, the Royal Academy of Engineering, the British Academy, the Council for Science and Technology, the Chief Scientific Advisers’ Committee, the Confederation of British Industry, and the Academy of Medical Sciences.

With respect to your point on UKRC’s strategic contracts, the UKRC has been appointed as a partner in the European Framework Programme 7 INTEGER project, due to commence in February 2011, for which it will need to secure £60,000 of further funding. If UKRC wish to participate in other FP7 projects, they will need to raise funding beyond the end of the current grant period. I am certain that UKRC will have been fully aware of the implications of taking on commitments beyond March 2011, without any commitment of future funding from BIS.

Our working relationship with UKRC has involved receiving monthly reports on their progress against agreed key performance indicators, and holding quarterly project management meetings with them. Informally, my officials have worked with UKRC throughout the current spending period, and have had regular contact with them.

The Rt Hon David Willetts MP