

Research Councils UK (RCUK)
Response to the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee
Second Report: *Scientific Infrastructure*

1. Research Councils UK (RCUK)

- i) Research Councils UK (RCUK) is a strategic partnership of the UK's seven Research Councils which each have a Royal Charter and together annually invest around £3 billion in research. We support excellent research, as judged by peer review, which has an impact on the growth, prosperity and wellbeing of the UK. To maintain the UK's global research position we offer a diverse range of funding opportunities, foster international collaborations and provide access to the best facilities and infrastructure around the world. We also support the training and career development of researchers and work with them to inspire young people and engage the wider public with research. To maximise the impact of research on economic growth and societal wellbeing, we work in partnership with other research funders including the Technology Strategy Board, the UK Higher Education Funding Councils, business, Government, and charitable organisations. Further details are available at www.rcuk.ac.uk.
- ii) This response is submitted by RCUK and represents its independent views. It does not include, nor necessarily reflect, the views of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). The response is made on behalf of all seven Councils:
- Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
 - Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)
 - Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)
 - Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
 - Medical Research Council (MRC)
 - Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)
 - Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC)

2. RCUK response to the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee Second Report: *Scientific Infrastructure*

Research Councils UK (RCUK) warmly welcomes the recommendations of the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee's report, *Scientific Infrastructure*, published in November of last year. These findings complement the Research Council's own strategic framework for investment in capital infrastructure for research, the RCUK *Strategic Framework for Capital Investment*¹.

Both RCUK and the House of Lords report highlight the vital role that scientific infrastructure plays in underpinning the UK's research excellence and its translation. We fully support the recommendation that a well planned, sustained and efficient future investment in scientific infrastructure is required in order to ensure that UK research is able to remain internationally competitive and that a level of stable investment is required to keep the UK at the forefront of science and technology.

RCUK looks forward to working with Government, funders and partners in planning the implementation of these recommendations.

3. Response to the conclusions and recommendations in the report

RCUK is pleased to make the following response to the Committee's conclusions and recommendations.

¹ <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/publications/RCUKFrameworkforCapitalInvestment2012.pdf>

Scientific Infrastructure: Planning and Governance (paragraphs 89-91)

RCUK is currently working with BIS as the consultation on capital investment planned by the Minister takes shape (to be launched early 2014). We welcome the establishment of an *ad hoc* advisory group for research infrastructure which will provide a focus for designing a well-developed implementation plan that will lead to a framework for delivery of a sustained and efficient future investment in scientific infrastructure.

Not just machines (paragraphs 92-93)

We concur with the report's recommendation that synergistic investment in skills and capacity is required alongside capital investment and that such investments should underpin the UK's research excellence. Ensuring researchers have access to advanced facilities as well as access to world leading scientific and technical expertise is essential for the UK to be the partner of choice globally. This will not only develop the attractiveness of the UK for research investors but also enable quick and reliable achievements, including path breaking discoveries and applications.

Shared benefits (paragraphs 94-99)

We welcome the prominence given to ensuring provision and access to mid-range infrastructure, and the recognition that both mid-range infrastructure and partnering in European and international projects is important as part of an overall ecosystem. This is a key element of ensuring the UK has internationally competitive facilities and equipment required to support world class research. RCUK fully supports, and has catalysed some of the efforts to promote regional access and sharing of equipment and facilities.

The report points to opportunities for the UK to be a partner in both European and international projects. RCUK recommends that these be considered on a case by case basis given the importance of ensuring strategic relevance to the UK, taking into account the need to enable UK access to world leading infrastructure and cutting edge capabilities, and their complementarity to existing UK involvement with many ESFRI and other international projects.

We agree that the strategy and underpinning investment plan for scientific infrastructure should include consideration of measures to encourage and facilitate further access to scientific infrastructure for industry. This complements the Research Councils vision for 'proximity to discovery' i.e. to create the environment that will:

- enhance and maintain the existing base, in order to attract multinational industry to co-locate and drive economic growth
- provide much needed flexibility to underpin the academic delivery of the industrial and life sciences strategies
- catalyse progress in the 8 great technologies
- train the next generation of researchers in cutting edge technologies
- sustain our leadership position in the global race

Conversely, failure to invest in a state-of-the-art infrastructure will limit our potential and achievements. RCUK's emphasis on 'proximity to discovery' is designed to highlight not only the attractiveness of the UK for research investors but also to emphasise quick and reliable achievements, including path breaking discoveries and applications.

RCUK is already investing in innovation campuses across the UK, based around major, internationally leading and long-term investments in research capability. Significant business and commercial activity is present at these locations, attracted by the substantial research capabilities on the campus, with extraordinary potential to develop as national focal points for national and international innovation in their fields. The UK research and innovation campuses represent a major opportunity within the UK to deliver impact from research, leading to the growth of new and emerging companies and encouraging global businesses.

Monitoring and evaluation (paragraph 100)

RCUK deems as good practice the view that monitoring and evaluation processes should be embedded from the point of investment and outcomes should be published and clearly communicated to industry, policy makers and the scientific community.

4. Conclusion

The implementation of all the report recommendations should help to provide an excellent opportunity for the UK to ensure we have the best available resources to stimulate growth and support the wellbeing of the nation - on the basis of a well-founded research environment of which we can be proud and of which we can have high expectations.

Research Councils UK

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