

How can a new Government signal its intent for science?

James Tooze (Policy Officer, Campaign for Science and Engineering)

Against a backdrop of political uncertainty, the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) have been consistently building the argument for the Government's commitment to an increase in research and development funding—something all parties have targets towards. James Tooze from CaSE shares some thoughts on how the new Government can signal their support for science and research.

Join our Policy Network

The Biochemical Society's Policy Network enables members to keep up to date and contribute their views into our policy activities. Input and expertise from our members is key to our work on a wide range of issues relevant to the molecular biosciences. These include antimicrobial resistance, equality, diversity and inclusion, research funding, publishing and open scholarship, European policy, and education policy. Email policy@biochemistry.org for further information.

The UK is currently in a state of political flux (to put it mildly), and it is fair to say that the uncertainty this generates is not breeding confidence in the scientific community. Despite this, the new Prime Minister has an opportunity to stimulate the ideas, innovation and investment that will improve people's quality of life and attract global attention by investing in UK science.

The new Prime Minister has already talked about providing tax incentives for research, and the need to ensure that researchers can come to the UK with minimal burden. CaSE has put together a five-point plan for the new Government, with actions that can be taken quickly to support UK science.

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The first is to set out a long-term plan and a budget to increase UK research intensity by 2027. The previous Government set a target to increase the UK's research intensity to 2.4% of GDP on R&D by 2027 and we recommend the new Government, having recommitted to this target, sets out a plan of how this can be achieved. Members of CaSE have told us that leadership and long term R&D investment from Government enables them to plan and gives industry confidence to continue to invest in R&D. The second part of our plan is to create a digital shop window for the UK innovation offer, a 'one-stop shop' to detail all types of research and innovation support for individuals, UK businesses or overseas businesses considering the UK as a place to invest. We also believe that the UK should embed the innovation principle in to all Government departments, so the UK can better support emerging technology and deliver the benefits of innovation more quickly.

A talented workforce will also be crucial in increasing research intensity in the UK. One way to do this is to attract international students from across the globe to study and settle here. The UK's offer for international

students to stay after their studies, however, is extremely uncompetitive when compared to other countries, which is why we are recommending that the post-study work visa for these students is extended to two years.¹ We are also recommending that to tackle the lack of diversity in the R&D workforce, the Government should coordinate central analysis and monitoring of diversity data to understand causes of under-representation, ensuring evidence can inform action taken by Government and other organizations.

At CaSE, we believe that these recommendations can go some way to enhancing the research and innovation landscape in the UK. Of course, the biggest challenge for our new PM is to negotiate the UK's exit from the European Union. We have been working with government departments in planning for the future of research and innovation in a post-Brexit world but without certainty on any future relationship it is difficult to know what lies ahead for the UK.

CaSE's full 5 point plan can be found at: <http://bit.ly/case-5pointplan>

The Biochemical Society is a member of CaSE and jointly funds James' policy officer role alongside 12 other organizations.

Please feel free to get in touch with our policy team about your experiences with Brexit. We would encourage you to get in touch with your MP to voice your concerns around Brexit, the risks of 'no-deal', and help them understand the impact on their constituents working in science and research. A guide on contacting your MP can be found at: <https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/contact-your-mp>

Footnote

¹Since this piece was written, the Government has announced it will be introducing a two year post-study work visa in the 2020/21 intake of students. The announcement was welcomed across the HE sector.