

# The Royal Society of Edinburgh

Embargo: 00.01 Wednesday 30 April 2008

## **Threat to UK Research Facilities – Leading Scientists Share Concern of New Report**

The £80 million shortfall in UK Government science funding is a threat to some of our country's key Research Facilities. Reacting to today's *Science Budget Allocations* report by the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee of the House of Commons, The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) welcomed the report which highlights important concerns for UK Science, jobs, output and international collaboration.

Professor Boulton, who is the General Secretary of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) reiterated the report's anxiety that in spite of an increase in the overall Science budget, the £80 million shortfall that is facing the new Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) over three years, makes the future uncertain for major research facilities in physics and astronomy. Emphasising the importance of Physics to the UK, an expert group within the RSE, chaired by Professor Boulton highlights the need for sustained support from government for leading edge research in the subject and concern that decisions be taken on robust scientific grounds. The Society notes that trained physicists permeate many crucial areas of technology including medicine, communications, energy and climate change and that maintaining the viability of the research base in physics is essential support for these applications.

Speaking on behalf of the RSE, Professor Boulton echoed the concerns of the Commons' Committee that the UK is likely to endure reputational damage if the country's involvement in international projects is reduced. Examples of such initiatives include the International Linear Collider and Gemini Observatories.

Professor Boulton, commented,

*It is a concern that such uncertainty over the future of key research facilities in the UK has been created by recent decisions taken by the STFC, particularly as so much good has been done by the Government in recent years to invest in the science base of the UK. Physics suffered a damaging decline in student recruitment in the 80s and 90s, resulting in the closure of many departments. Many universities resisted this trend. In Scotland, we created the Scottish Universities Physics Alliance (SUPA), which networks the best researchers across Scottish universities in supporting research and graduate studies, funded by the Scottish Funding Council, the Scottish Government and the former DTI. This has led to dramatically increased student recruitment at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and attracted international researchers and collaboration of the highest level.*

*We think it important that Government take on board the recommendation from the Committee that no decisions that would undermine the long term future of physics in the UK are taken until the Wakeham review has concluded. The important principle is that major decisions about the direction of research funding in physics, as with all scientific disciplines, should be made on an informed and strategic basis, and not driven by a short term budgetary problem.*

### **Notes for Editors:**

This press release is in response to the publication of the report by the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee published on Wednesday 30 April.

### **Media Contacts:**

**For further media information on the Royal Society of Edinburgh, please contact:**

Stuart Brown, The Royal Society of Edinburgh RSE

Tel. 0131 240 5000

Mobile: 077 11 710 249

e-mail: [sbrown@royalsoced.org.uk](mailto:sbrown@royalsoced.org.uk)

**About Royal Society of Edinburgh**

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE), Scotland's National Academy, is Scottish Charity No. SC000470. Independent and non-party-political, our wide-ranging educational activities include:

- Organising lectures, debates and conferences
- Conducting major independent inquiries
- Providing educational activities for school students throughout Scotland
- Distributing over £1.7 million to top researchers and entrepreneurs
- Showcasing to the World the best of our research and development
- Increasing two-way international exchange
- Encouraging, promoting and rewarding excellence
- Offering state-of-the-art conference facilities
- Publishing internationally respected learned journals

The RSE was founded in 1783 by Royal Charter for the “Advancement of Learning and Useful Knowledge”. Today it has around 1400 Fellows whose expertise encompasses the full spectrum of the sciences, medicine, engineering and technology, education, law, the arts, humanities, social sciences, business, industry, the professions and public service. This multi-disciplinary perspective makes the RSE unique amongst the United Kingdom’s learned societies. It is funded by a range of carefully selected charitable, public and private bodies. Its mission today is providing public benefit through the advancement of learning and useful knowledge.

[www.royalsoced.org.uk](http://www.royalsoced.org.uk)

***The Royal Society of Edinburgh, Scotland’s National Academy is Scottish Charity No. SC000470***

~ Ends ~