

# Science, Research and Innovation Minister talking about the Future Leaders Fellowships

It's great to be back.

I'm especially delighted that I'm able to make my first speech as your returning Science, Research and Innovation Minister talking about the Future Leaders Fellowships.

Back in May, in a speech at the LSE, I was able to announce the first ever 41 Future Leaders Fellows.

I was struck then not only how the programme had attracted successful applications from around the globe, but had helped to secure funding for modern, interdisciplinary approaches to research.

From the polar ice-sheet modelling being done by Lauren Gregoire at the University of Leeds, to a study by Rod Mitchell at the University of Edinburgh into how to protect childhood cancer patients from future infertility.

I've been delighted to see that in the 78 Fellowships awarded in the second wave, a broad range of study is reflected with researchers who have chosen the UK to conduct their research. Take Aurelie Lepine at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. She will undertake exciting new research into protecting African women from HIV. Kay Brandner also, moving from Tokyo to Nottingham, to push the frontiers of quantum thermodynamics.

It's proof that, when it comes to research, the UK is truly global.

As your Science and Research Minister, I want the UK to become even more attractive for international researchers to come and study. The Future Leaders Fellowship is clearly helping to achieve this, but we can go further.

Our International Research and Innovation Strategy is helping to inform future work on how we can build new international research partnerships, and I look forward to the publication of the Sir Adrian Smith review this autumn, which will also inform our thinking about how best to grow our international research partnerships in future. Our Future Leaders Fellows represent some excellent research by some researchers who are still at an early stage in their careers. From Patricia Clay working on the chemical evolution of planets at the University of Manchester to Timothy Carroll at UCL working on the sociopolitics of religion, it is clear that we have some remarkable innovators and researchers whose work will help shape society for the twenty first century.

It is important to reflect upon the long-term commitment that the Future Leaders Fellowships brings. Not only for the researchers themselves, who will

benefit from investment worth up to £1.2 million over four years, but also for the wider science and research community. The government has invested over £900m in the Future Leaders Fellowship programme over an 11 year period, ensuring that at least 550 fellows will benefit from the scheme.

It is this stability, this certainty, that as your Science Minister I seek to achieve right across the board.

For if there is one thing that I have come to better understand in this role, and indeed as I did in my seven week sojourn as Health Minister, it is that we need to plan ahead, to be able to map out the future. To meet challenges by not merely plugging a gap, but by creating sustainable and long lasting solutions.

One of my last acts as Science Minister before my placement at the Department of Health was to announce the first real-terms uplift in QR funding for over a decade. And I intend to take up from where I left off, fighting to increase the investment that needs to be made in science and research for the future.

My LSE speech, at which I announced the first 41 Future Leaders Fellows, was the first of four speeches I gave to highlight the vital importance of why the UK needs to meet its proposed target of 2.4% of GDP, both public and private investment, being spent on R&D by 2027. And 2.4% is just to stand still, to meet today's OECD average. While Germany and China have already reached 3%, and South Korea 4.5%, I believe we really must see 2.4% as the bare minimum, the baseline, which we cannot fall short on.

I do not wish to repeat arguments I have made elsewhere in my '2.4% series', apart from to reassure all of you in this room today that you have in me a Science and Research Minister who will campaign tirelessly to ensure that we deliver increases to our public research budgets, not just in the short term, but critically in the long term also. I am on record elsewhere that I want to see a long term, real terms increase in our R&D budget: not just for one year, or two years, or even across a spending review settlement; but a long term plan, a framework which provides stability and security for future investment.

My first 2.4% speech at LSE, announcing the Future Leaders Fellowships, also focused on what I regard as a priority when it comes to research, development and innovation investment. People.

Without the people to fill the research positions that will need to be created to conduct the research that will achieve 2.4%, that measure is in itself a futile dream.

Without investment in people, we won't just miss our 2.4% target. We will witness an erosion of our science and research capabilities, as other countries run faster, competing more and more aggressively in their offer to become the most attractive place to undertake a research career, leading not merely to a 'Brain drain', but an exodus of talent.

2.4% matters, not merely because of the additional cash needed, but because

we have the opportunity to create a sustainable, thriving research community that underpins it, forging a world leading reputation for the UK as the best place to conduct research, the best place to create the ideas and build the solutions that will change the world.

Sustainable communities are created by not simply offering jobs. They must be founded on building careers, establishing a pipeline of talent at each and every stage of a researcher's lifetime. In my dual role as Universities Minister, I want to ensure that our degrees and postgraduate qualifications can best prepare individuals who wish to pursue a research-led career, whether in academia or in industry.

I also want to highlight what I've referred to as the 'Cinderella subject' of education and research policy: that surrounding early career research. How can we create an environment that ensures early career researchers are not only better paid, but feel valued, that their work is properly recognised and rewarded? Last week, the publication of the updated Researcher Development Concordat, led by the Chair of Universities UK, Julia Buckingham, pointed to the need for us to build a supportive and truly inclusive research culture if we are to enhance the appeal and sustainability of researcher careers in the UK, with employment and career development practices that enable researchers to develop their full potential. I entirely support the Concordat, and urge all universities and research institutions to adopt it.

Because creating a 'people first' research policy must not simply be about paying lip-service to the growing demands on early career researchers. This is a topic I care deeply about, and want us all to be focusing our attention on. A people first research policy means constantly reflecting upon and changing our research culture.

This year we have already agreed that we should create a new Research Integrity Committee within UKRI, to provide additional oversight of the research integrity agenda, ensuring that we are doing everything we can to call out and stop sharp practice in research.

And UKRI are proceeding at pace with their review of open access policies, ensuring that the results of publicly funded research are freely available not just to the taxpayers that have paid for it, but also to new technologies and new audiences overseas, helping UK research to be as internationally open as possible.

UKRI have also recognised the need for greater diversity and transparency when it comes to ensuring that we all recognise that research talent is everywhere, while still opportunity is not.

I welcome the fact that under Jennifer Rubin's leadership, with the help of a group of external advisers, UKRI are ramping up their evidence gathering work to really identify what works and what doesn't as we build a truly inclusive research culture.

But I also am acutely aware that for all Future Leaders Fellows, the ability to conduct your research unhindered and free from the constraints of what

should I say, 'normal academic life', is just as important as some of the financial investment that has been made today.

Pressure is experienced by us all, but I know myself as a historian, writing books late into the night, that there are few disciplines such as the process of academic thought and research creativity, that can be so adversely affected by the impositions of the outside world.

So I'm keen to do all I can to help investigate how to reduce these pressures, to understand where we need to refine our processes and minimise unnecessary paperwork, and find out where additional flexibilities need to be created, to clear the path for researchers to be free to conduct the research they need to.

This includes looking again at our various research funding models, ensuring that we are doing everything we can to unlock the creativity and imaginations of everyone working in research, whether they work in universities, research institutes or in industry.

It also means focussing on our efforts on that critical point in a researcher's early career, when they feel most precarious, and when the strictures of an academic career can seem so burdensome that most choose simply to take a different path in life, away from research altogether. So let us celebrate today the remarkable achievement of every single one of the 119 Future Leaders Fellows for their great success across both rounds.

But let us also use this opportunity to reaffirm our joint commitment, both as a government and as UKRI, to our researchers – the people that will build our future.

Let's fight hard to build a truly long-term, sustainable research community, solving the research and innovation challenges of tomorrow by putting people first – giving them the opportunities, support and encouragement today, to allow them to succeed tomorrow and well into the future.

Thank you.