

This Conservative Government understands that whether it is...

Government is backing British ingenuity

A new body – UKRI – will bring a fresh approach to funding the work of our scientists and innovators

SAM GYIMAH



Asking anew how Britain will make its way in the world, Brexit has revealed an issue that has been brewing for more than a decade. Prior to the crisis in 2008, the UK's economic fortunes were buoyed up by financial services and North Sea oil and gas. With the City less profitable today, and North Sea output naturally declining, the search is on for the next wave of world-leading British businesses.

Meanwhile, global breakthroughs in scientific knowledge and technological progress are disrupting entire industries at an unprecedented pace. Here, Britain is well-placed to lead. We may often speak of ourselves as a nation of sheepherders, but we are also a nation of scientists, engineers and innovators.

So if we want to seize the future, now is the time to double down on the economy of ideas and invest in science and innovation. That is why the Chancellor announced an additional £4.7 billion in public funding for science, research and innovation over the current spending review period, the largest increase for 40 years. And we have set an even more ambitious goal for our future: to increase public and private investment in research and development by a third, to 2.4 per cent of GDP by 2027.

This is central part of our industrial strategy. Just as the Government's target to spend 2 per cent of GDP on defence is our commitment to national security, this R&D target is a commitment to economic security.

Today we are launching the biggest shake-up of how government supports research and innovation in a generation. To realise the full potential of this investment, a new organisation called UK Research and Innovation will pull together the eight bodies that currently fund academic research with Innovate UK, which co-invests with businesses in promising technologies.

UKRI will bring a new, strategic approach to funding the best efforts of our scientists and innovators. The new organisation will make for better-directed, more collaborative research. It will provide a strong voice for world-class science, research and technology. It will have a mandate to ensure that science makes it from the lab to the real world, and that those ideas are put into action – in industry, in our hospitals, in small businesses.

Too often, Britain is the country that comes up with the best innovations, only to see them developed and commercialised elsewhere. Our goal is that the formation of UKRI changes this story, and that the fruits of success will be felt far beyond this generation.

Britain is very good at generating the big thinking and innovation now needed to address the critical challenges of our time. From Newton to Faraday, and from Ada Lovelace to Frank Whittle, the UK has a long history as a science and technology superpower. Name a problem facing the world and chances are that we have researchers, entrepreneurs and technicians at the forefront of the effort to put it right. At the Faraday Institution in Harwell, Oxfordshire, scientists are designing new battery technology to power the clean cars of the future. Tech companies like DeepMind and Improbable are deploying artificial intelligence and augmented reality in fields from

healthcare to architecture. And at the Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult in Stevenage, businesses are exploring how personalised medicines can offer cures for once incurable diseases.

Clean growth, the future of ageing, artificial intelligence and mobility are some of the biggest challenges and opportunities facing the world. UKRI enhances Britain's ability to help address these global problems, while yielding prosperity for the country.

Government has a role to play, but ultimately successful research and innovation relies on serendipity, determination and the spark of genius that comes from the best minds working together. So, to deliver on this ambition, Britain has to be the go-to place for the world's brightest and best scientists and innovators.

This Government understands that whether it is in the labs of our great universities or in the marketplace, success relies on fostering the "can-do" spirit our nation is built on. In backing ingenuity, enterprise and endeavour, we are helping write the next chapter for our economy – and helping make the world a better place.

Sam Gyimah is the minister for universities, science, research and innovation.

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