

CHANGES TO THE RESEARCH, HIGHER EDUCATION AND INNOVATION LANDSCAPES

At the heart of the UK's research system should be the "Haldane Principle" whereby scientific decisions about investment in research are made by researchers independently of Government, while Government sets the overall strategic direction. The application of this principle helps to ensure that excellence remains the primary criterion for investment and a foundation of the UK's research, higher education and innovation system.

The changes proposed in the Nurse Review aim to strengthen UK research strategy and the interface between the scientific community and policymakers. Crucial to achieving these goals will be:

- closer links between the Research Councils, Innovate UK and QR funding, alongside greater strategic oversight of the development of new areas of research, interdisciplinary research and national capability;
- the continued scientific and organisational autonomy of the individual Research Councils, Innovate UK and QR funding;
- the creation of leadership positions in the new structures that are designed to attract, enable and retain individuals of the highest calibre, including scientists in high standing with the community; and
- the formation of a high-level oversight body for science that will put science closer to the heart of government. This will be valuable, given the importance of research and innovation to the economy and society.

The research system consists of interlocking components, and if Government takes forward only some of the proposals in the Nurse Review it risks causing damage and failing to meet its objectives. Implementation will require many technical changes, which must collectively add up to a coherent strategic vision.

The Nurse Review's recommendations will be taking effect at the same time as a range of other changes to the research and higher education landscape. During this period, maintaining and strengthening the link between teaching and research will be essential to achieving the Government's aims. Beyond the Nurse Review, the Society welcomes the ambitions articulated in the recent Higher Education Green Paper. In designing the mechanisms to achieve these ambitions it will be particularly important to ensure that they provide discipline-specific information on teaching quality, and build on the work already being done by higher education institutions to improve teaching and widen access.

It will also be important to ensure that the system retains the key knowhow to enable decisions to be made with sufficient expert insight. The organisations that support higher education institutions must retain the expertise necessary to help them operate effectively across the spectrum of their activities, including research, innovation, teaching and knowledge exchange. Throughout, the design and delivery of proposals should be considered in the context of the cumulative effect of other changes that affect researchers' and academics' working lives, such as the outcome of Lord Stern's review of the Research Excellence Framework.

Finally, and taken together, the changes should be designed to ensure the most efficient use of the Government's capital and resource investment. If the system changes work well, it will make it easier to ensure effective planning for the interdependencies of these and other strands of funding and it will strengthen UK research.

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