

Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling MP
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry
Department of Trade and Industry
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

6-9 Carlton House Terrace
London SW1Y 5AG

tel +44 020 7451 2507
fax +44 020 7451 2691

www.royalsoc.ac.uk

From the President Lord Rees of Ludlow
26 February 2007
Our ref: NB/26/02

Dear Secretary of State

I write to you following the recent announcement by the Department of Trade and Industry that it is to make cuts to the budgets of the Research Councils in order to cover deficits elsewhere in its budget.

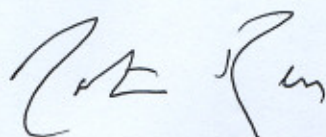
The Royal Society is concerned that these cuts infringe the established principle that Science Budget funds are strictly ring-fenced within DTI. They threaten also to set a dangerous precedent for similar action to take place in future, reducing the credibility of future assurances regarding ring-fencing.

It is true that £68m is a small percentage of the overall science budget. However, it is a substantial fraction of the uncommitted funds that are needed if we are to seize new opportunities. And – perhaps even more importantly – it sends a negative and damaging signal to those whose commitment is needed if the UK is to sustain its scientific competitiveness, and will have a demoralising effect on the scientific community.

These budget cuts will have the effect of encouraging Research Councils to deploy their full budget early on in future years. It is essential that Research Councils are not deprived of the ability to respond, with flexibility and agility, to important issues and needs which may arise in an unforeseen manner at any time of the year. The likely outcome of these cuts is a regrettable rigidity in the future strategic use of funds.

Given the Government's strong overall support for science, which I have publicly applauded on several occasions, and which you have yourself frequently proclaimed, it is all the more disappointing that DTI should lose so much hard-gained ground - in terms of perception and goodwill, as well as in reality - by seeking to impose these cuts.

Yours



Martin Rees

cc Sir Brian Bender, Sir Keith O'Nions, Sir David King



President Lord Rees of Ludlow
Executive Secretary Stephen Cox cvo

Founded in 1660, the Royal Society is the independent scientific academy of the UK, dedicated to promoting excellence in science

Registered Charity No 207043