



The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP  
Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)  
1 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0ET  
United Kingdom

20 August 2020

### **National Academies in the Devolved Nations Engagement on the R & D Roadmap**

Dear Secretary of State,

The Royal Society of Edinburgh, Learned Society of Wales and the Royal Irish Academy are the national academies for Scotland, Wales and the island of Ireland respectively. We represent, champion and disseminate research, learning and useful knowledge. We welcome the publication of the BEIS Research and Development roadmap and the ambitions it sets out for the UK's future research strategy. We particularly welcome the commitment from the UK Government to work with the devolved academies in developing this.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to offer these initial reflections to BEIS on the roadmap. We look forward to exploring with BEIS how we can contribute so that all parts of the UK, including the devolved nations, are able to benefit from the commitments and ambitions set out in the roadmap. While the roadmap brings forward creative new proposals, it also presents a timely opportunity to consider how participation from devolved nations in existing programmes can be strengthened, including the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund.

As independent and multidisciplinary national academies working across higher education, research, business and public life, we are well placed to draw upon a wide range of expertise and practitioner experience from both within and outwith our fellowships to stimulate thinking and engagement on the R&D roadmap in the devolved nations. This includes our ability to make strategic connections between the R&D roadmap and the structures, frameworks and networks that currently support research and innovation in the devolved nations. It is crucially important that there is meaningful engagement between the devolved administrations and the UK Government on research and innovation policy. This includes ensuring that UK-wide bodies with key decision-making responsibilities for research and innovation, including UKRI, take full account of the needs, priorities and contributions of

the devolved nations. Our national academies can help support ongoing dialogue between the different levels of government.

In taking forward the roadmap there is a need to both maintain and enhance research excellence and the UK's competitive strengths in this area and to level up R&D support and capability across the UK. It will also be crucially important that the roadmap supports a healthy research ecosystem encompassing the full spectrum of research from fundamental to applied and challenge-led approaches. The strategy will also need to provide the conditions that stimulate increased business investment in R&D in order to address longstanding productivity gaps and regional imbalances in R&D intensity. To achieve this, the strategy will need to set out long-term, clear and sustainable objectives and approaches that provide confidence and certainty to researchers, research institutions, business and public, private and charitable funders.

There are several areas of the roadmap in which our national academies can make a valuable contribution. This includes the importance of levelling-up R&D investment and support across the UK and, in turn, improving innovation, growth and productivity in local economies. There exist significant differences in the levels at which R&D is supported across the different regions of the UK. While gross expenditure on R&D for the UK as a whole is £527 per head of population, in Scotland it is £466, in Northern Ireland it is £371, and in Wales it is £238.<sup>1</sup> We strongly agree that a priority for the roadmap will be to level up R&D investment across the UK, including in relation to research infrastructure. We would be pleased to discuss with BEIS opportunities for our national academies to contribute to the development of the R&D Place Strategy and input to the R&D Place Advisory Group.

We note that there is no reference within the roadmap to the vital role that European Structural and Investment Funds have played in developing research capacity and infrastructure in certain parts of the UK. It is notable that the contribution of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to research and innovation in Wales is €125 per capita: five times the UK average of €23 per capita.<sup>2</sup> While the UK Government has committed to provide successor funding to European Structural Funds through the establishment of a UK Shared Prosperity Fund, there is currently no detail on the scale, objectives and allocation of

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Gross Expenditure on R&D by Government Office Region 2017 figures

<sup>2</sup> The European Structural and Investment Funds – Contribution to UK research and innovation; British Academy, Royal Society of Edinburgh, Learned Society of Wales and Royal Irish Academy, 2020

<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/news/european-structural-and-investment-funds-key-uk-research-and-innovation/>

such funding. With decision-making on both the R&D roadmap and the Shared Prosperity Fund being subject to the cross-Government Spending Review, there is an opportunity to consider how they will connect to each other, including the potential for strategic alignment of shared objectives.

Recognising the importance of unlocking and nurturing a breadth of talent to support the UK's research and development ambitions, we welcome the proposal to develop an R&D People and Culture Strategy. We also are supportive of defining science and research broadly. As multidisciplinary national academies, we recognise the value that comes from bringing together experts and practitioners from a broad range of disciplines and backgrounds, particularly when it comes to addressing major societal challenges.

Our national academies recognise the importance of supporting researchers at all career levels with a view to attracting and retaining researchers in the devolved nations. It is particularly important that the UK research ecosystem maintains a good pipeline of younger career researchers. This emphasises the importance of providing for and supporting career-long professional development for researchers.

Each of our national academies is committed to supporting early career researchers and professionals within higher education, industry and beyond. Key contributions to this include:

- The Young Academy of Scotland which was established by the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2011. It provides a platform for innovative young professionals from all areas of academia, business, third sector organisations and public life to work together to address the most challenging issues facing society in Scotland and beyond.<sup>3</sup>
- The RSE's longstanding and independently evaluated Enterprise Fellowship programme which has supported entrepreneurial researchers and innovators to grow their ideas into promising businesses. Over the last two decades it has supported more than 250 Enterprise Fellows from 36 UK academic institutions to launch 166 new businesses.<sup>4</sup>
- The Royal Irish Academy convened a working group in 2018 to capture the perceptions and experiences of early career researchers in higher education institutions on the island of Ireland, and continues to work with stakeholders on highlighting the issues raised. The Academy also held a 'Knowledge Frontiers'

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<sup>3</sup> RSE Young Academy of Scotland is available: <https://www.youngacademyofscotland.org.uk/>

<sup>4</sup> RSE Enterprise Fellowships: <https://www.rse.org.uk/awards/enterprise-fellowships/>



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THE LEARNED SOCIETY OF WALES



*The Royal Society  
of Edinburgh*

KNOWLEDGE MADE USEFUL



Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann  
Royal Irish Academy

symposium in early 2020, which focused on the theme of ‘natures, cultures and communities’ and offered an opportunity for early career researchers from the UK and Ireland to come together and develop networks and ideas.

- The Learned Society of Wales has been working with early career researcher focus groups and stakeholders to develop a multidisciplinary ECR network, spanning higher education, industry and public life. This will launch in the autumn.

We can draw upon these established networks to ensure that the views of those embarking on their research careers can inform the development and implementation of a comprehensive R&D strategy for the UK.

We are keen to continue our engagement with BEIS so that the development of the R&D strategy is informed by and addresses the needs of the devolved nations as well as the UK as a whole. We look forward to discussing with BEIS how we can harness the collective strengths of our national academies to help achieve this aim.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Marcel Jaspars  
Vice-President  
Royal Society of Edinburgh

Professor Gerry McKenna  
Senior Vice-President  
Royal Irish Academy

Professor Hywel R Thomas  
President  
Learned Society of Wales

cc. Amanda Solloway MP, UK Government Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Research and Innovation

Richard Lochhead MSP, Scottish Government Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science

Kirsty Williams MS, Welsh Government Minister for Education

Diane Dodds MLA, Minister for the Economy, Northern Ireland