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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Our research priorities for 2013

2013 will be pivotal to UK research.

January sees the launch of [the REF](#) submission system, and not long afterwards we expect the Chancellor to announce a Comprehensive Spending Review outlining the Government's 2013–15 budget priorities.

Firstly, if the Chancellor wants to kickstart growth, he must invest in research. Latest data suggests the UK invests only 1.8% of GDP on R&D compared to 2.34% in the OECD. As a start the Government must ring fence current levels of research funding, before going on to develop a long-term investment plan. Innovative research sustains the economy; it ensures industry has the knowledge to disrupt established markets and the edge to create new ones. In 2010–11, UKHE supplemented UK businesses' income by £3.3bn through knowledge creation, professional training, and consultancy—a contribution that is growing at 7%.

Secondly, if this funding is to have the greatest economic multiplier, it must flow to centres of research excellence. This might seem obvious, but we have observed a recent countervailing trend: a funding bias towards size rather than excellence. In particular, many Government funding pots—[HEIF](#), Open Access funding, and [IDEAS factory](#) funding—are restricted to institutions that meet certain arbitrary levels of historic funding. This unjustifiably disadvantages high-quality smaller teams.

Thirdly, the Government must do more to support the future academic supply chain by supporting postgraduate taught students. Higher undergraduate debt burdens and scarce postgraduate funding risk deterring talented students from further study, threatening both the future research base and the supply of highly skilled graduates needed for the economy.

Finally, we worry that any new

financial settlements will overlook the arts, humanities and social sciences. Although money is tight, the Government ought to do more to signal these disciplines' ongoing value and recognise their economic impact. In the economic squeeze, it is easy to forget that the purpose of higher education is to push the boundaries of knowledge. It should extend and deepen our understanding of the world, it should enable us to bridge cultural differences, and it should give us the distance to reflect on the past. This higher-order purpose will only be achieved if all disciplines have a chance to contribute to the rich cultural discourse.

In all, we welcome the opportunity that 2013 presents us to champion the crucial role that smaller research-intensive universities play in UK research.

Alex Bols

Read Zoë Molyneux's article on research funding in [The Guardian](#). ■

1994 GROUP IN THE MEDIA

Government ought to invest in research excellence

Writing in *The Guardian*, Zoë Molyneux, senior researcher at the 1994 Group, defended the essential role that smaller research universities play in the UK research-base.

She warned against a trend of dispensing research funding to institutions on the basis of size, writing "we must not assume that global impact can only be achieved through scale".

Read Zoë Molyneux's article on research funding in [The Guardian](#).

Efficient universities—spending Government funding wisely

With the Government calling for universities to demonstrate how they have spent public funding efficiently 1994 Group universities have been doing their bit, says Alex Bols, Executive Director of the 1994 Group, in *Education Investor* (print only).

In the 3-page feature

Bols explains how 1994 Group universities are leading the sector on efficiency, cross-sector collaboration, and Knowledge Transfer. This has included working closely with business, with the number of industry-sponsored research contracts in 1994 Group universities growing 27%.

Read Alex's speech from the [Education Investor Conference, delivered in September, 2012](#).

Campaigning for

postgraduate provision

As part of our ongoing work to reform postgraduate provision, the 1994 Group submitted [new postgraduate figures to *The Observer* last weekend](#).

Since publication of '[The Postgraduate Crisis](#)', the 1994 Group has become the loudest sector voice on postgraduate issues. On Thursday, Alex Bols, Executive Director of the Group, discussed postgraduate research funding on [EU Radio](#). ■

POLICY WAVES

It is already time to move to BBB

Cameron and Clegg remain committed to easing student number controls. In Monday's *Mid-Term Review* they wrote:

We will give our world class universities more freedom [...] by giving them more control over the number of highly qualified students they can admit.

This references the Coalition's plan to uncap recruitment on ABB+ students later this year.

This is encouraging—the 1994 Group has campaigned long and hard for such measures—but, as we have written before, such liberalisation does not go far enough.

In December we argued for the uncapping of BBB+ students in 2013, with further liberalisation to follow in 2014–15. The rationale is simple. If the Government wants to drive up competition and improve student choice—as described in the HE Whi-

te Paper—they must relax student controls.

Current student controls mean that universities face Government reductions in core numbers whilst being able to recruit as many AAB students as they want. However, with a tightening of A-level results this year, the sector saw a decline in the AAB cohort size. This, paired with the Government encouraging the best universities to expand their numbers to support student choice, meant that we saw some good students moving from one good university to another, with unfilled places in some excellent institutions. No doubt moving to ABB—with its larger cohort—will be a step forward, but it doesn't go far enough. Liberalising student number controls will ensure that all good students are able to choose the best course and institution for them.

To boot, restricting recruitment flexibility to such a small cohort does little to widen opportunity to talented students from diverse backgrounds.

Nonetheless, we do appreciate the Government's concerns. The Treasury worries that liberalisation will boost university progression rates in unpredictable ways, saddling them with extra student loans. The problem lies with the equivalencies: while the number of good A-level students progressing to university is stable, the progression rates for graduates with equivalent qualifications are less predictable.

However, the Government will get its first indications of any changes in behaviour later this month. HESA has already started releasing 2011/2012's enrolment data and this, along with SLC loan take-up data, will enable extensive modeling to take place.

After checking these figures against their worries, the Government should proceed with further liberalisation without delay.

Read our [response to the Milburn report](#), alongside our [response to the Government's HE White Paper](#). ■

OUR UNIVERSITIES IN THE MEDIA

Birkbeck psychologists scoop top awards

Two academics at Birkbeck, University of London, have received major awards from the Experimental Psychology Society.

Professor Martin Eimer, a world class specialist in face blindness, received the Society's Mid-Career, which recognises an established researcher's distinguished and consistent contribution to the field.

Dr. Matthew Longo, Director of BodyLab, a laboratory that conducts leading research into body representation, received the Prize Lecture, which reco-

gnises high-potential early career researchers.

Royal Holloway receives additional £21.5m in Government funding

Royal Holloway, University of London, will receive an extra £21.5m in funding to conduct research into the 'super-material' graphene, one of the thinnest, strongest, most conductive materials known to man.

This forms part of a £50m tranche of extra science funding released by the Government. Rt. Hon. David Willetts MP, Minister for Universities and Science, said, "This significant investment in graphe-

ne will drive growth and innovation, create high-tech jobs and keep the UK at the very forefront of this rapidly evolving area of science."

Royal Holloway's research will concentrate on developing new equipment that can operate at very high frequencies, such as drug detection devices.

Dr. Vladimir Antonov said, "The funding will allow us to expand our capabilities and get involved in a wide collaboration on exploitation of unique graphene technology."

Leicester set to announce Richard III findings

In the first week of February, the University of Leicester will announce the results of its scientific tests into the identity of human remains discovered in a council car park. It is suspected that the remains belong to Plantagenet King Richard III of England.

King Richard III was killed at the Battle of Bosworth Field in the decisive battle of the War of the Roses, paving the way for Henry VII, the first Tudor, to take the throne.

The University of Leicester previously announced that the remains showed signs of scoliosis and battle trauma. ■

HE AGENDA

17/01/13 - British Council and HEA workshop: 'European higher education reforms'

17/01/13 - HEA workshop: 'Teaching professionalism in higher education in further education'

19/01/13 - QAA conference: 'Educational oversight feedback conference 2013'

22/01/13 - HEFCE conference: 'Religious literacy in contemporary society'

22/01/13 - UUK immigration workshop: 'Retaining highly-trusted status'

24/01/13 - UUK immigration workshop: 'Arrival and post-arrival responsibilities'

05/02/13 - UUK immigration workshop: 'Preparing for Tier 4 audits' ■