

NHSF comment in advance of the Autumn Statement

21 November 2016

On 23 November the Chancellor will publish his autumn statement, and has already indicated that he is not intending to significantly loosen spending despite the general economic outlook currently being somewhat better than forecast. Since the budget this spring, the decision to withdraw from the European Union has fundamentally changed the landscape for science, heritage and research, increasing levels of risk to existing programmes and of uncertainty to future ones. Heritage science research is particularly susceptible to these uncertainties as it draws on funding from at least 16 different funding strands.

Cultural heritage is currently eligible for significant EU funding from 2014-2020 including for conservation, digitization, infrastructure research and skills through programmes including: European Structural & Investment Funds, Horizon 2020, Creative Europe, Erasmus + and Europe for Citizens. For heritage science the most significant of these is Horizon 2020, the EU framework programme for Research & Innovation. The programme has €80 billion to invest over 2014-2020.

We call on the Chancellor to renew his commitment of 13 August to underwrite the payment of Horizon 2020 awards, where applications are submitted while the UK remains a member of the EU. We call on him further to give an initial indication of the government's medium-term financial plan to support research excellence once the UK is no longer an EU member.

It has recently been announced that the EU will award €4 million to the European Research Infrastructure for Heritage Science (E-RIHS). This three-year investment, from 2017, includes support for a Central Hub and National Hubs, including E-RISH.uk. Heritage Science in the UK supports many crucial sectors, such as museums generating £1.5 billion p.a. income, while the conservation, repair and maintenance sector in England is estimated at £4.7 billion. The sensors and instrumentation industry, supporting these activities, underpins a wide range of industrial activity with UK sales amounting to £3 billion.

We call on the Chancellor to commit to upgrading the UK heritage science infrastructure to improve economic productivity across cultural and research institutions.

Earlier this year, in the budget, the Chancellor announced:

- Commitment to the Northern Powerhouse, backing strengths in science and innovation;
- a £14m in investment in the Birmingham STEAMhouse, bringing together arts and culture with science, technology, engineering and maths to drive innovation.
- a £15m investment in a National Institute for Smart Data Innovation – The government will invest £15 million in the National Institute for Smart Data Innovation in Newcastle

We call on the Chancellor to give an indication in his statement of the concrete steps the government is taking to deliver on these commitments.

The reports, this morning, that the Autumn Statement will include a commitment to a further £2 billion a year for scientific research and development are very welcome and we look forward to seeing further details of the Government's plans for this and for the emerging industrial strategy.

Heritage science underpins enjoyment, understanding and access to cultural heritage, thus helping to give UK citizens a sense of their identity and their place in the world. It is also an effective route to building the partnerships that bring together cultural organisations, skills, leadership and knowledge, across a range of national and local partners that is cited a means of ensuring that culture benefits communities across the country in the Culture White Paper. As the UK begins to chart a new course independently of the EU, it is particularly critical that the government indicates its continued support for sound science and research. The autumn statement is an excellent opportunity for the government to do so.

Alastair McCapra
Chairman, National Heritage Science Forum

Notes:

The National Heritage Science Forum was set up to address the recommendations of the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee Inquiry on Science and Heritage and to implement the objectives of the National Heritage Science Strategy.

<http://www.heritagescienceforum.org.uk/strategy.php>

The Forum brings together 20 leading academic and heritage organisations that are active in the field of heritage science research. It provides a platform to support the policy, research and professional needs of institutions engaged in heritage science.

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