

Cautious Welcome for Autumn Statement from Heritage Science

The National Heritage Science Forum has given a cautious welcome to the Chancellor's Spending Review Announcement of 25 November.

Alastair McCapra, incoming Chair of NHSF, said 'The Announcement includes a 17% cut to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and a 20% cut to the Department for Culture Media and Sport, but we welcome the positive statements of support for science and for culture that present opportunities for heritage science. The announcement that government will continue to prioritise investment in science to help ensure the UK remains a world class centre of research is encouraging, and the protection of today's £4.7 billion science resource funding in real terms for the rest of the Parliament is to be welcomed'.

Current Co-Chair Nancy Bell of The National Archives commented: 'We support the government's commitment to taking forward the recommendations of the Nurse review of Research Councils. We see the establishment of a new body – Research UK – as an opportunity to drive a step-change in support for interdisciplinary research, of which heritage science is a leading example, through the development of new structures and funding opportunities.'

'Of concern is the potential that reduced settlements to Arms Length Bodies may hinder recent progress in heritage science research with adverse consequences for the sector as a whole. We note, in particular that the government has not acted on the recent recommendation of the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology, to establish a clear roadmap for increasing public and private R&D investment in the UK to 3% of GDP.'

The Forum will work with Government, Arms Length Bodies and member organisations to maximise the contribution that heritage science research makes to understanding and addressing the present needs and future requirements of cultural heritage for public benefit. NHSF now calls for a new era of openness and sharing that will drive efficiencies, improve science and increase opportunities for attracting funding from diverse sources. Working in partnership across institutions is not just desirable but necessary. NHSF strongly recommends the benefits of building partnerships that are not just cosmetic and between like institutions, but among institutions (HEIs, non-HEIs and industry) where the sharing of resources, including knowledge and equipment, will deliver added value. Examples such as the NHSF Kit-Catalogue that facilitates equipment sharing amongst the heritage science community and the successful Science and Heritage Programme (SHP) that engaged fifty new industry partners (business, industry and SMEs) in heritage science research are indicators of the possibilities to be developed.

The repeated capital commitment of £6.9 billion between 2015-2021 to support infrastructure is also welcome. NHSF strongly recommends that the heritage science research funding over the last decade, (notably the £8.1 million investment by AHRC and EPSRC in the Science and Heritage Programme which ran from 2007-2014) should now be underpinned by infrastructure that will reach every part of the UK, wherever heritage is located. The Government has acknowledged the contribution that culture makes to the economy through tourism. The next five years will be the most challenging yet for institutions that use and rely on vital heritage science research to protect and make accessible cultural heritage to visitors both local and international. NHSF reiterates the proposal for investment of £40 million in capital infrastructure it submitted in response to the 2014 BIS consultation on long-term capital investment in science and

research. This investment will capitalise on existing research and innovation and develop the heritage science base for the UK to continue as world leader in this field.

Within the UK, five research hot spots have emerged as a result of SHP strategic funding. These hot spots in Scotland and Northern Ireland, North of England, Central England, London and the South East, and Wales and the South West are viewed as the possible foundation on which five regional clusters of excellence engaging HEIs, IROs and industry can be built. The government's ambitions for the Northern Powerhouse, including its support for cultural initiatives such as the Great Exhibition and associated legacy fund, new gallery at Manchester Museum and legacy for Hull City of Culture would align well with the development of a northern cluster of excellence in heritage science. Investment in heritage science infrastructure will secure the UK's world leadership in heritage science against the risks identified by the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee of the UK losing its place as world leader in all fields of scientific endeavour.

Over the period covered by the spending review NHSF will redouble its efforts to build collaboration between institutions to maximise efficiencies, stimulate new research, work with research organisations to develop cross-discipline research programmes and help deliver solutions to preserve and improve understanding of our heritage that will support NHSF's ultimate vision of 'citizen heritage science' in which volunteers are able to participate in work led by scientists and through engagement with heritage science the protection of cultural heritage becomes the responsibility of the many and not the few.

Notes

1. The National Heritage Science Forum (NHSF) brings together leading organisations that carry out and use heritage science research. Its members are universities, national museums, libraries and archives, and heritage organisations. The Forum, through its 20 member organisations, supports the strategic development of heritage science in terms of research, capacity building, application, collaboration and infrastructure. The Forum is an independently constituted organisation (registered charity no. 1154160) funded by its members and led by a board of trustees. <http://heritagescienceforum.org.uk/index.php>

Members: Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, Birmingham Museums Trust, British Library, British Museum, Cardiff University, English Heritage Trust, Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland, Historic Royal Palaces, Icon the Institute of Conservation, National Galleries Scotland, National Trust, Natural History Museum, Royal Armouries, Tate, The National Archives, University College London, University of Cambridge Museums, University of Oxford, Wellcome Library.

2. The Forum has its roots in the recommendations of the House of Lords Select Committee report on Science and Heritage (2006), the Science and Heritage Programme (AHRC/ESRC 2007/12) and the Science and Heritage Strategy (Published 2010). A key goal of the Forum is to pursue the development and delivery of the strategy. <http://heritagescienceforum.org.uk/strategy.php>

3. The Forum works to improve partnership within the sector and with others by increasing collaboration to help practice make better use of research, knowledge and innovation and to enhance resources, funding and skills, investment and profile. It works to demonstrate the public benefit of heritage science and increase public engagement and support for it.

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