



The Save British Science Society

29-30 Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9QU

Tel: 020 7679 4995 Fax: 020 7916 8528

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Keeping a focus on the core roles of universities

SBS response to the Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration

1. Save British Science is pleased to submit this response to the call for submissions to the Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration. SBS is a voluntary organisation campaigning for the health of science and technology throughout UK society, and is supported by 1,500 individual members, and some 70 institutional members, including universities, learned societies, venture capitalists, financiers, industrial companies and publishers.

2. We have not attempted to answer the specific questions set out in the consultation document. We do not pretend to have specific and detailed knowledge of such issues as the ways in which industry uses information contained in academic publications.

3. SBS's major concern is that in a review of this kind, we do not lose sight of the fact that business-oriented research is and *should be* a relatively minor part of the overall portfolio of university research. Any changes brought about to encourage greater collaboration between academia and industry must not have the consequence of making it harder for the universities to fulfil their primary roles in education and in the generation of new knowledge.

4. As the Pre-budget Report, which announced the setting up of the Lambert Review, makes clear, the nation's universities have changed dramatically in recent years, while UK business has failed to take full advantage of the new opportunities. As the Pre-Budget Report expresses it, "to be effective in boosting UK innovation, increased supply of technological knowledge and skills must be matched by stronger demand and capabilities within business".¹ In the jargon, academic "push" is outstripping industrial "pull".

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5. For the past decade or more (certainly since the publication of the 1993 White Paper *Realising Our Potential*), universities have been cajoled into emphasising the immediate economic benefit of their research. Funding mechanisms have stressed short-term research of a more applied nature, to the extent that substantial sums of the Science Budget are now earmarked for specific programmes, explicitly aimed at particular sections of the economy. For example, the recent allocation of the Science Budget included a programme on the rural economy,² which is properly the concern of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

6. As the recent survey of interaction between higher education and business showed, British universities have embraced these changes, and are remarkably good at producing spin-out companies, generating consultancy income and filing patent applications.³

7. The UK's universities already obtain a higher proportion of their research income from private industry than their counterparts in other countries.⁴ That is not because British industry is more charitable than foreign industry, but partly because of chronic underfunding from the public sector, and partly because UK universities can deliver what business needs and wants.

8. The conclusions of the Lambert Review must focus on how to encourage UK business to take advantage of these changes in the ways in which universities operate, *not* on perpetuating the myth that universities are badly managed ivory towers that are uninterested or unskilled in working with business.

University Governance

9. SBS notes that issues about university governance, management and leadership were added to the Lambert Review as an afterthought, following the original announcement of the outline terms of reference.

10. SBS does not believe that university governance is an appropriate issue for a review of university-business collaboration to address. Universities have primary functions in teaching and research. Their governance, management and leadership should therefore be primarily about teaching and research.

11. If the Government has concerns about the governance, management and leadership of universities, it is quite entitled to have a review. But it is totally inappropriate to sneak it in as an afterthought to a review that was set up to address one specific and small part of what universities do.

April, 2003

¹ *Steering a steady course: delivering stability, enterprise and fairness in an uncertain world. Pre-Budget Report*, H M Treasury, 2002 [Cm 5664].

² *The allocation of the Science Budget*, Office of Science & Technology, 2002.

³ *Higher Education-Business Interaction Survey 2000-2001*, HEFCE, 2003 [HEFCE 03/11]

⁴ *Main Science & Technology Indicators and Basic Science & Technology Statistics*, OECD