

Committee of Public Accounts

UK Research and Innovation: Investment in research infrastructure

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Committee of Public Accounts

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Summary

The Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade (the Department) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is developing many commendable plans to better exploit the research infrastructure that UKRI has funded. UKRI is the UK's largest single public funder of research and innovation with a record budget of £9.2 billion for 2026–27. The Department and UKRI can, however, do more to show they are rising to the challenge of getting value for taxpayers from government's investments in research and development, and to keep the UK at the global forefront of innovation.

There is also more the Department and UKRI can do to convert UK innovations into growth. The government's ambitions for the economy require the UK to have high-quality, accessible, and internationally competitive research infrastructure. In 2024–25 UKRI, spent £1.2 billion on building, maintaining and upgrading this infrastructure. The Department and UKRI are thinking creatively about how to use research infrastructure and other resources to support innovative businesses, such as by offering free time on publicly funded supercomputers to start-ups, and a commitment to procure large-scale quantum computers so British companies can be among the first to benefit. However, the Department and UKRI's thinking on how to ensure these businesses share their successes with the nation is less developed, and we believe the government should be much shrewder in managing intellectual property and bolder in considering taking stakes in promising companies it has backed with grants. The longer UKRI and the Department spend thinking, reviewing and considering what they might do, rather than actively intervening to ensure the taxpayer benefits, the more opportunities will be missed. The research infrastructure funded by UKRI is becoming ever more important, as advancements and breakthroughs at the cutting edge of technology determine the new winners and losers on the global stage. The critical role UKRI will play in this race cannot be overstated, and it is vitally important that it spends the money available to it wisely, in accordance with a strategic plan and taking into account its existing infrastructure investments.

UKRI must articulate a clear and ambitious strategy when deciding how the UK's research infrastructure should be developed, in line with its risk appetite, and must ensure it stays abreast of technological developments.

UKRI must also review the condition of its existing research infrastructure estate, which is bloated, with ageing assets in poor condition, not all of which are still needed. UKRI has launched an estates modernisation programme, but it and the Department should be much more actively prioritising decisions on what infrastructure could be decommissioned, to improve value for money. Whilst decisions need to be made in a proportionate and timely way it is not reasonable to expect upgrades to large parts of infrastructure quickly as this will detract from spending on operational activities.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. **UKRI and the Department are thinking creatively about how the government can support emerging innovative businesses, but there is more to do to translate this into results.** We received evidence that small businesses often find publicly funded research infrastructure opaque, slow and expensive to access, and unsuited to their needs. UKRI provided several examples of how it is supporting businesses, and AI companies in particular. For example, it provides free time on publicly-funded supercomputers to startups carrying out strategically significant AI research and development. The Department acknowledged the government could still do more to be a better customer, given the potential for government procurement to help technology companies to grow. However, the Department has recently changed its procurement approach to make it more likely that UK companies will supply some of the £400 million worth of specialised AI chips it plans to purchase. Disappointingly, British companies still find it much harder than their US counterparts to obtain the capital investment they need to grow while remaining based in the UK. We welcome the government's review of how it is supporting businesses to 'scale-up', and the Department's attempts to strengthen links between UKRI's grant recipients and government-funded sources of capital such as the British Business Bank and the National Wealth Fund.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department should develop quantitative metrics covering its various support mechanisms for businesses, beyond just grant funding, and which allow comparisons between years. It should report on these annually. Together with other information, these metrics should allow the Department's overall progress in supporting scaling businesses to be monitored.

2. **We are concerned that UKRI is not doing enough to ensure the taxpayer fully reaps the rewards of public investment in research and innovation, it must address this as a matter of urgency.** The British Business Bank is acting as a 'cornerstone' investor in innovative companies alongside pension funds, meaning the taxpayer shares in the benefits of successful investments. Government's aim is to bring in more investment from

pension funds, but the Department accepts that the pace of change has been slower than it would have liked. According to the Department, UK universities generate more spinouts and patents per unit of research resource than their US counterparts, but the way universities make the most of their intellectual property (IP) is patchy. UKRI takes a different, more liberal approach to IP controls than some other parts of the public sector; we are not convinced this is justified. It could, for example, look to take more equity stakes where it is providing funding. UKRI told us that it is worth looking again at its standard IP terms and conditions, but that it is seeking to strike a balance with the design of its IP controls so as not to inhibit companies' growth. This approach is far too cautious and we urge the Department to do much more to recover taxpayer's money when a successful company exploits research which the taxpayer, via UKRI, has paid for.

RECOMMENDATION

UKRI should write to the Committee alongside its Treasury Minute response to tell us what changes it plans to make to its grant funding terms and conditions in both intellectual property and equity stakes and the intended impact for the taxpayer of this.

- 3. The dispersed nature of research infrastructure is inefficient and creates particular challenges for researchers outside the 'Greater South East' of England.** It can be difficult to identify what research infrastructure exists in the UK, and access is often uneven and unnecessarily complicated. The current VAT framework for research infrastructure, along with other barriers, discourages researchers from using facilities outside their own institution. We also heard that UKRI has focused on large investments and paid less attention to whether the overall landscape is balanced, efficient and resilient. The issue is more acute for researchers and innovators in regions outside the 'Greater South East' (the London, South East and East of England regions) which receives half of all UKRI funding. While UKRI does consider the impact of its spending decisions on regional growth, it has not set specific targets for the regional distribution. However there has been an improvement over the last five years: 20% of its spending now takes place in the north of England (up from 12% previously). The Department attributes this to the increased quality of research taking place outside the 'Greater South East' as a result of targeted programmes like Strength in Places.

RECOMMENDATION

UKRI should determine how much funding should be allocated to different regions of the country and set targets to ensure this occurs, while also ensuring that the overall outcomes benefit researchers across the whole of the country.

- 4. UKRI has been slow to take decisive action on rising costs and underperforming projects.** We agree that UKRI innovate and must take risks and should expect some projects in its portfolio to encounter problems, not least because it is doing things never done before. It rightly recognises it needs to be able to take appropriate action when these issues occur. It has acted quickly and strategically in some cases, for example it approved the business case for the National Cryogenic Facility within nine months of conceiving the project. It also manages risk on some research infrastructure projects by providing seed funding before deciding whether to go ahead. However, there are still examples of problems persisting without resolution, and a lack of strategic thinking. UKRI cancelled funding for its airborne laboratory five years after deciding to upgrade it, after spending £46 million of the £49 million budget; we believe it could have taken action sooner. UKRI could also have been quicker to realise the Science and Facilities Technology Council's (STFC's) plans were unaffordable. The decisions it will soon take to bring spending back under control could have serious consequences for the UK's skills base, for sites such as the Daresbury research campus, and for the UK's reputation as a partner in international collaborations such as CERN.

RECOMMENDATION

UKRI should set clear thresholds for determining whether it should continue to fund research infrastructure projects. These should be aligned with its risk appetite for the project and take account of the project's performance and strategic value.

- 5. The Department has given UKRI flexibility in how it funds infrastructure, but UKRI is not yet making enough use of long-term budgets.** We were pleased to hear that UKRI is confident that it has the right freedoms to operate, including the power it has agreed with HM Treasury to move 1.5% of its allocated funding between financial years. The government has also committed to set 10-year budgets for R&D investment in specific areas, a step which was welcomed by organisations writing to us. However, we were surprised that the Department has only made use of this on two programmes to date. We are not convinced it is striking the right balance between providing certainty and retaining flexibility to respond to new scientific discoveries. The Department and UKRI failed to ensure the ARCHER2 national supercomputer's replacement will be ready before ARCHER2 is turned off. The 13-month expected delay would have been longer without the University of Edinburgh's decision to proactively prepare its site by upgrading a grid connection. However, we were pleased to hear that UK researchers will once again have access to high-quality computing when the new system opens and that UKRI believes it can mitigate the consequences of the delay for researchers in the meantime.

RECOMMENDATION

- a. UKRI should consider what more it could do to identify long-standing research infrastructure which needs greater long-term funding certainty. For example, it should look at including the decision on whether to allocate a long-term budget in business cases.
- b. The Department should also set out a broad financial commitment around how much it and UKRI will spend on new supercomputer capabilities beyond the current spending review period.

6. UKRI and the Department are not ensuring that infrastructure is adequately maintained and is decommissioned at the right time.

UKRI relies heavily on research infrastructure maintained by universities, but it is becoming increasingly difficult for these institutions to make the sustained investments needed. Restoring university-owned research infrastructure to a fully operational condition would cost £5.6 billion, at a time when many universities have large financial deficits. The government is right to be worried about some of these deficits. The cost of maintaining UKRI's own research infrastructure is also unaffordable, but UKRI believes it can reduce this if it prioritises, and reduces the size of its estate accordingly. It has recently begun an estates modernisation programme as large parts of its estate are ageing and in poor condition. For example, around 45% of STFC's estate is in an unacceptable state, with consequences for the research it carries out. STFC is developing cost estimates for decommissioning and expects to understand the potential costs better in three to six months. The Department agrees with us that, although decommissioning is controversial, it can be the right choice where there are opportunities to modernise infrastructure or make better use of the land.

RECOMMENDATION

UKRI should write to the Committee within six months to set out:

- a. How much it expects STFC to spend on modernising infrastructure within the current Spending Review period.
- b. How much it expects STFC to spend on this in subsequent Spending Review periods, and what assessment it has made of the benefits of modernising this infrastructure earlier.
- c. How much it expects STFC to spend on decommissioning redundant infrastructure in the current Spending Review period.
- d. The estimated annual cost of maintaining under-utilised or redundant infrastructure which will not be decommissioned or disposed of in the current Spending Review period.
- e. What major programmes will be cut as a result of this.

1 Converting UK innovations into growth

Introduction

1. On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, we took evidence from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) on investment in research infrastructure.¹ Since the Committee took evidence, the functions of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology relevant to this inquiry have transferred to the Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade (BIST). References to ‘the Department’ in this report therefore refer to DSIT in relation to the evidence given to us, and BIST in relation to present responsibilities and our recommendations.
2. The Department is responsible for just over two thirds of the government’s research and development (R&D) spending. UKRI is the Department’s primary R&D delivery body and the UK’s largest single public funder of research and innovation. It has a record budget of £9.2 billion for 2026–27.² It combines seven disciplinary research councils, Research England (which supports research and knowledge exchange at higher education institutions in England) and Innovate UK, which supports business-led innovation.
3. UKRI builds, maintains and upgrades research infrastructure, which academics and businesses use to carry out research and innovation. In 2024–25, it spent £1.2 billion on research infrastructure, representing around 10% of the Department’s £12.6 billion total spending on research and development.³ Research infrastructure consists of the facilities, resources and services used to conduct research and innovation activities. They can include specialist equipment, laboratories, supercomputers, and large-scale multi-use facilities. They are a key part of the UK’s research and innovation landscape and are integral to the UK’s role as a hub for international collaboration.⁴

1 C&AG’s Report, [DSIT’s investment in research infrastructure](#), HC 1735, 13 March 2026

2 UKRI, [Budget allocations for UK Research and Innovation](#), December 2025

3 C&AG’s Report, paras 5 and 1.2

4 C&AG’s Report, para 1

4. We also received written evidence from a range of submitters, including voluntary sector organisations, academics and researchers, as well as wider government stakeholders. A full list of the written evidence we received is available on the inquiry page of our website.⁵ Particular issues and concerns drawn to our attention included:

- regional disparities in research and innovation funding and infrastructure, and the benefits of research clusters and regional collaboration models;
- the challenges of maintaining and sharing research infrastructure housed in universities in a difficult funding environment;
- the barriers preventing businesses from making best use of research infrastructure;
- the lack of a comprehensive mapping of UK research infrastructure;
- how UKRI could evaluate and appraise the socio-economic impact of research infrastructure; and
- the workforce of technicians and other specialists needed to operate research infrastructure to its full potential.

Creative support for innovative businesses

5. The government’s ambition is for the UK to be “one of the top three places in the world to create, invest in and scale-up a fast-growing technology business by 2035”. This ambition requires high-quality, accessible, and internationally competitive infrastructure so researchers can conduct cutting-edge research and innovation activities.⁶ UKRI’s role includes supporting innovation by commercial businesses.⁷
6. UKRI’s mission is to ‘advance knowledge, improve lives, drive growth’. It suggested that the part of its mission on driving growth has been a “less overt” priority for it in the past, but it is keen to change this.⁸ In written evidence to us, The Royal Academy of Engineering stated that innovation infrastructure had at times felt like a second order priority and should be prioritised alongside research infrastructure. To complement the government’s emphasis on growth and scaling it highlighted “the critical need for targeted investment in high-quality open-access physical and digital innovation infrastructure that supports late-stage R&D, scale-

5 Committee of Public Accounts, [Investment in research infrastructure Written evidence](#)

6 C&AG’s Report, para 1

7 Q5, C&AG’s report, para 1.3

8 Q 59

up and commercialisation”.⁹ Other submitters to our inquiry highlighted that businesses can find publicly funded research infrastructure opaque, slow and expensive to access, and unsuited to their needs. For example, the National Measurement Laboratory suggested that in many cases the infrastructure exists, but routes to use it are complex, costly or capacity-limited. This makes it particularly difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises to benefit.¹⁰

7. We asked about what co-ordination there is across government and with the private sector of research and development spending, and how UKRI decides what to fund.¹¹ The Department told us that it was now ensuring spending on research was linked much more explicitly to the government’s industrial strategy. UKRI described its three aims: delivering commercial benefit; advancing curiosity-driven research that discovers new knowledge; and making social impact . It told us that all three were complementary and told us it measured the success of its infrastructure portfolio by assessing how it contributed to achieving all three aims.¹²
8. The Department recognises the power of government procurement to help technology companies to grow and acknowledged that government should be a better customer.¹³ It highlighted the government’s commitment to procuring a large-scale quantum computer in the next spending review period.¹⁴ It also told us that it has ensured that the AI Research Resource programme will use a number of different kinds of chips, so that highly innovative UK companies have a better opportunity to win contracts.¹⁵ This programme will ultimately spend £400 million on these specialised chips.¹⁶ The Department also told us that it provides free time on publicly funded supercomputers to AI startups.¹⁷ To be eligible, these startups must be carrying out strategically significant AI research and development.¹⁸
9. We asked what the Department is doing to bring more private sector investment into supercomputing and challenged it on whether high British energy costs are holding back innovative companies. It pointed to its creation of the AI growth zones programme to facilitate the building of larger private sector AI data centres. It told us that companies raise

9 [IRI007](#)

10 [IRI0006](#), [IRI0007](#), [IRI0015](#), [IRI0022](#), [IRI0025](#)

11 Q 25, Q 5

12 Q 5

13 Q 55

14 Q 24

15 Q 5

16 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, [UK AI Hardware Plan](#), June 2026

17 Q 29

18 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, [Compute, Strategic Assets & Procurement | UK Sovereign AI](#), accessed 24 June 2026

the issue of high and escalating energy costs with it a lot, so it has arranged for data centres in those of its AI growth zones with excess renewable energy to, in future, receive discounts on their energy costs.¹⁹

10. The Department accepted that much less capital investment is available to British companies looking to grow than is available to their US counterparts. However it believes that the venture capital funding gap is much smaller if expressed as a percentage of the two countries' respective GDPs – which would represent a considerable improvement on the position ten years ago.²⁰ The Department told us that a cross-government review into support to scaling businesses is in progress, and that it is looking to strengthen links between UKRI's grant recipients and government-funded sources of capital such as the British Business Bank and the National Wealth Fund.²¹

The rewards of public investment in research and innovation

11. The UK ranked sixth in the 2025 global innovation index and excels at research and innovation.²² However, the Department recognises that the UK is often less successful than the United States at supporting companies to scale up commercially and universities to exploit their intellectual property (IP). The Department told us that British Business Bank is acting on behalf of taxpayers as a 'cornerstone' investor in innovative companies to encourage pension funds to invest in growing businesses. However, it accepted that the pace of change has been slower than it would have liked.²³
12. According to the Department, UK universities generate more spinouts and patents per unit of research resource than their US counterparts, but it acknowledged that not enough are registering IP – and that their approach to exploiting it is 'patchy'. Some universities are trying to keep too much IP for themselves, while others are not providing enough support to help academics looking to 'spin out' ideas into startup companies. It told us that more universities are adopting the practices of leading American universities such as Stanford or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. However it recognises that there is still more that universities, and the government, can do to ensure they unlock the potential economic value of UK research.²⁴

19 Qq 29, 56; Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, [Delivering AI Growth Zones](#), CP 1440, November 2025

20 Q 53

21 Qq 63-64

22 C&AG's Report, para 3.2

23 Qq 53, 62

24 Q 62

13. We were interested to hear that UKRI takes a different, ‘more liberal’ approach to IP than some other parts of the public sector including the Advanced Research and Innovation Agency and the National Institute for Health and Care Research. This means the taxpayer is potentially missing out on recouping its expenditures if the company subsequently exploits the IP commercially. UKRI told us that it is currently reviewing whether its standard IP terms and conditions are encouraging the universities it funds to make the most of the IP their research generates. However, it noted there is a risk that overly stringent terms and conditions would inhibit spinout companies from attracting private investment and growing.²⁵ This is not a concern that we share, if relevant commercial contracts are appropriately drafted.
14. We explored what the Department and UKRI are doing to encourage private sector co-investment in projects it funds. UKRI considers that almost everything it does is done in concert with business. It has been set a high-level objective to leverage £3 of private investment for every £1 it spends on applied research and supporting businesses. However, it thinks that parts of its portfolio will attract a considerably higher ratio of private investment. It described the example of a long-running scheme called Prosperity Partnerships where businesses must match UKRI’s investment, in exchange for co-owning the IP that is generated as a result.²⁶ UKRI is also aiming to more effectively identify the “crown jewels” within its portfolio of investments—the parts of the UK’s research base with very high value and growth potential—and connect them to investors.²⁷

25 Q 61

26 Q 57

27 Q 61

2 Making wiser spending decisions

The geographical balance of research infrastructure

15. UKRI told us that its objectives include ensuring that regional growth is considered in its investments, but it has no particular target associated with this.²⁸ According to UKRI, in the last five years its distribution of funding to the north of England has increased from 12% to around 20%. The Department attributes this to the increased quality of research taking place outside the ‘Greater South East’ (which is made up of the London, South East and East of England regions) as a result of targeted programmes like Strength in Places.²⁹ However, in 2023–24, half of UKRI’s investment still went to the ‘Greater South East’.³⁰
16. UKRI’s corporate plan describes its intention to “maximise use of existing research and innovation infrastructure capabilities”.³¹ However, the written evidence we received highlighted that it is difficult for potential users to identify what research infrastructure exists in the UK, and access can be uneven and unnecessarily complicated. We heard that the current VAT framework for research infrastructure, with other incentives, can discourage researchers from using facilities outside their own institution.³² The University of Bath also told us that UKRI and the Department have focused on large investments and paid less attention to whether the overall landscape is balanced and resilient.³³

28 Qq 12, 17

29 Qq 12

30 [Letter from UK Research and Innovation to PAC dated 25 June 2026](#). For these figures, the North of England comprises the North East, North West and the Yorkshire & the Humber regions, and the Greater South East comprises London, South East England and East England.

31 UK Research and Innovation, [UKRI corporate plan update 2025 to 2027](#), November 2025

32 [IRIO011](#), [IRIO017](#), [IRIO020](#), [IRIO027](#)

33 [IRIO020](#)

The need for quick and strategic decisions

17. UKRI was clear that it needs to innovate and therefore should expect a few projects in its portfolio to encounter problems or even fail, because it is doing things never done before. It views its ability to ‘course correct’ when this happens as crucial.³⁴ It told us it can act quickly when it needs to, for example by approving the business case for the National Cryogenic Facility within roughly nine months of the project being conceived.³⁵ It also explained how it manages risk on some research infrastructure projects by providing seed funding before deciding whether to go ahead with the main investment.³⁶
18. We asked UKRI to justify the decision it recently took about the future of its airborne laboratory – an aeroplane which measured conditions in the atmosphere. UKRI had funded a £49 million project to upgrade the aircraft and keep it in service for longer. However earlier this year, after £46 million of the budget had been spent, UKRI decided not to provide the £30 million of operating costs the aircraft also needed. It defended this decision, arguing that the aircraft’s value for money was deteriorating as it was costing more to operate and fewer researchers wanted to use it. It also noted that other emerging technologies such as drones allow researchers to carry out science in different ways.³⁷
19. Several of the organisations which sent us written evidence observed that UKRI research councils and government departments do not always take a sufficiently joined-up approach. This can leave research infrastructure that serves multiple disciplines and user communities without a clear route to access funding.³⁸ For example, the Wellcome Trust told us that funding for the long-term operating costs of the electron bio-imaging centre at the Diamond Light Source, which uses very intense beams of light to study atoms and molecules, has fallen between organisational boundaries.³⁹
20. The Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) spent £1,031 million last year, a 27% increase compared to 2021–22 when it spent £810 million.⁴⁰ The budget which UKRI has allocated to the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) over the Spending Review period will require it to reduce its spending compared with its previous plans: the budget for

34 Q 31

35 Q 52

36 Qq 33, 51

37 Q32, C&AG’s report para 2.6

38 [IRI0006](#), [IRI0012](#), [IRI0026](#)

39 [IRI0012](#)

40 UK Research and Innovation, [Explainer: STFC prioritisation outcomes 2026 to 2030](#), July 2026

2029–30 is £877 million.⁴¹ In a recent open letter, UKRI’s Chief Executive explained that this was partly caused by an ‘ambitious’ programme from the previous Spending Review period while some projects were costing more than expected. Rising energy costs and unfavourable movements in foreign exchange rates had also increased STFC’s annual costs by over £50 million a year.⁴²

21. We received correspondence from the Institute of Physics and the Particle Physics Action Group expressing significant concerns about the impact of this.⁴³ When we raised it, UKRI told us that STFC’s costs for its planned activities are no longer affordable within its budget. UKRI’s management is now engaging with the research community to understand what activity it might slow down, mothball and stop. It views this process and the decision on the funding allocation as rational and reasonable management steps.⁴⁴
22. We expressed concerns that these decisions may have serious consequences for the UK’s skills base, for sites such as the Daresbury research campus, and could harm regional research and innovation ecosystems. The decisions may also damage the UK’s reputation as a partner in international collaborations such as CERN, which operates the world’s most powerful particle accelerator.⁴⁵ Particle physics researchers at the University of Liverpool concurred in their written evidence, telling us that UKRI’s sudden decision to deprioritise the LHCb 2030+ project at CERN and the abrupt manner by which the decision was communicated has created considerable adverse impact and risk to international experiment collaboration.⁴⁶ We subsequently learnt that UKRI’s decision to stop funding a project at the Jodrell Bank Observatory could result in the closure of the site’s historic radio telescope.⁴⁷

41 C&AG’s Report, para 3.5, UK Research and Innovation, [Explainer: STFC prioritisation outcomes 2026 to 2030](#), July 2026

42 UK Research and Innovation, [Open letter from Ian Chapman to research and innovation community – UKRI](#), February 2026

43 [Letter from the Group Chief Executive, Institute of Physics to PAC dated 8 June 2026](#); [letter from Assistant Professor in High Energy Physics, University of Cambridge and Postdoctoral Research Associate, Institute for Particle Physics Phenomenology, University of Durham to PAC dated 5 June 2026](#)

44 Qq 1, 40

45 Qq 49-50

46 [IRI0028](#)

47 UK Research and Innovation, [Factsheet: Jodrell Bank, e-MERLIN and UKRI funding – UKRI](#), July 2026

23. We heard that the most important thing, from UKRI's perspective, is to end up with a balanced portfolio, high value for money for the taxpayer and maximum impact. That involves UKRI making difficult decisions.⁴⁸ However, STFC considers that the facilities at Daresbury are ripe for additional involvement from other research councils within UKRI.⁴⁹

Budget flexibility for research infrastructure

24. UKRI told us that it is confident it has the right freedoms to operate and highlighted that the Department now allows it to move up to 1.5% of its allocated funding between financial years (reflecting the Department's similar agreement with HM Treasury). The Department was more cautious, noting that this is the first year it has had that flexibility and that it is too early to say whether it would enable the Department to do everything it wants to do.⁵⁰ The government has committed to set 10-year budgets for public R&D investment in specific areas, a step which was welcomed by organisations writing to us.⁵¹ However, the Department and UKRI acknowledged that they have so far only made use of this on two programmes: one for the National Quantum Computing Centre and one for the Laboratory of Molecular Biology. The Department noted that science is developing very rapidly at the moment, and highlighted the risk that widespread use of long-term budgets would limit its ability to change focus if required.⁵²
25. In its written evidence to us, the UK Institute for Technical Skills & Strategy suggested that across the board, the limiting factor preventing research infrastructure from being used to its full potential is not the capability of the equipment itself, but the availability of technical expertise to support it. This expertise is often in short supply because of short-term and insecure funding for technical roles.⁵³ UKRI's 2019 assessment of research and innovation infrastructure found that only 41% of those responsible for nationally or internationally important research infrastructure felt able to plan more than three years ahead (most had an expected operational lifespan of 25 years or longer).⁵⁴

48 Q 50

49 Q 48

50 Qq 22-23

51 HM Government, [The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy](#), November 2025, CP 1451, page 57; [IRI0007](#), [IRI0012](#)

52 Q 20

53 [IRI0014](#)

54 [IRI0009](#); UK Research and Innovation, [The UK's research and innovation infrastructure: Landscape Analysis](#), November 2019

- 26.** The ARCHER2 national supercomputer will not be replaced on time, as the Department and UKRI could not afford the £750 million cost of its replacement until recently. The expected 13-month delay between ARCHER2 closing and its replacement becoming operational would have been longer without the University of Edinburgh’s decision to proactively prepare its site by upgrading a grid connection, at its own expense.⁵⁵
- 27.** UKRI and the Department told us they plan to bridge the gap until the new national supercomputer is ready in 2027 by using a network of new and existing computers located around the UK, and by taking advantage of its access to European supercomputing infrastructure.⁵⁶ UKRI noted that the Mary Coombs supercomputer provides more or less the same computing capacity as ARCHER2.⁵⁷ It claimed that with this network, more compute capacity will be available from November 2026, when ARCHER2 goes offline, than in the current supercomputing service.⁵⁸ It expects that the new national supercomputer will be in the top 50 worldwide and will give UK researchers access to high-quality supercomputing again.⁵⁹

Maintenance and decommissioning of research infrastructure

- 28.** UKRI relies heavily on research infrastructure owned and maintained by universities.⁶⁰ However, as the Russell Group informed us in its written evidence, it is becoming increasingly difficult for these institutions to make the sustained investments needed to support such infrastructure. The University of Oxford’s Jenner Institute—which was able to build on earlier work to rapidly develop a COVID-19 vaccine—illustrates the value of receiving sustained support.⁶¹ Restoring university-owned research infrastructure to a fully operational condition would cost £5.6 billion, at a time when many universities have large deficits.⁶²
- 29.** The Department told us it was very aware of the financial sustainability issues facing universities. It pointed to government decisions to increase the proportion of research funding that goes to universities as a block grant, and to allow tuition fees to rise with inflation. We questioned whether the Department and UKRI were doing enough to ensure that public money only

55 Qq 27, 74; C&AG’s Report, paras 11 and 2.14.

56 Qq 27-28

57 Q 47

58 Q 27

59 Q 28

60 Qq 6-7

61 [IR10027](#)

62 Q 6, C&AG’s Report para 3.6

goes to financially stable universities.⁶³ UKRI and the Department argued that as universities are independent institutions, government should not be seeking to control the detail of their business decisions, staffing mix and plans for achieving outcomes. We were not convinced – as the Department and UKRI are ultimately responsible for the value for money of the sector. The Department’s view is that some universities’ deficits may be a result of investment decisions that are perfectly legitimate given their balance sheets, while other universities’ deficits are more worrying.⁶⁴

- 30.** UKRI acknowledges that the cost of maintaining UKRI’s own research infrastructure is also unaffordable.⁶⁵ Large parts of its estate are ageing and in poor condition; many buildings have structural problems or issues with asbestos. Overall, around 45% of the STFC’s estate is in an unacceptable state. More widely, STFC faces particularly significant budget challenges.⁶⁶ When asked about the consequences of this maintenance backlog, STFC acknowledged that it is stopping researchers from running some experiments.⁶⁷ Our concerns with STFC infrastructure is that it is been allowed to deteriorate over a number of years. It is unreasonable for it to be restored immediately and cuts to be made to valuable programmes in order to do so.
- 31.** However, UKRI believes that it can reduce its maintenance costs by prioritising the infrastructure it should be maintaining and disposing of the remainder.⁶⁸ It explained that it has recently begun an estates modernisation programme. STFC told us that it is developing cost estimates for decommissioning facilities and expects to have a good idea of potential costs in three to six months.⁶⁹ The Department told us that that decommissioning is controversial but agreed it can be the right choice where buildings are at the end of their useful lives and there are opportunities to modernise.⁷⁰ UKRI noted that the sites of decommissioned buildings are often repurposed. For example, the National Quantum Computing Centre was built on land previously occupied by an older research facility.⁷¹

63 Q 11

64 Qq 6, 8

65 Q 9

66 Qq 1, 40, 67-68

67 Q 65

68 Q 9

69 Qq 65-67

70 Q 72

71 Q 73

Formal minutes

Thursday 15 October 2026

Members present

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, in the Chair

Mr Clive Betts

Anna Dixon

Rachel Gilmour

Sarah Hall

Rupert Lowe

Blake Stephenson

UK Research and Innovation: Investment in research infrastructure

Draft Report (*UK Research and Innovation: Investment in research infrastructure*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 31 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Sixteenth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned till Monday 19 October at 3.00 p.m.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Thursday 11 June 2026

Emran Mian, Permanent Secretary, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology; **Alexandra Jones**, Director General for Growth, Science and International, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology; **Sir Ian Chapman**, Chief Executive, UKRI; **Professor Michele Dougherty**, Executive Chair, Science and Technology Facilities Council

[Q1-75](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

IRI numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	2Encapsulate Ltd	IRI0006
2	Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC Group)	IRI0021
3	Buziuk, Hleb (Independent public policy and governance researcher, FairGo CIC)	IRI0002
4	Cancer Research UK	IRI0018
5	CORNERSTONE, University of Southampton	IRI0025
6	Brown, Andy, Chaytor, Sarah and Hewson Chris (Co-chairs, Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN)); Duncan, Sophie and Manners, Paul (Co-directors, National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE)); Gower, Owen (Director, UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE)); Hettrick, Simon (Chair, Hidden REF and Director of Strategy, Software Sustainability Institute (SSI)); Jacobs, Neil (Associate Director, UK Reproducibility Network (UKRN)); Leighton, Suzie and Wilson, Evelyn (Co-directors, National Centre for Academic and Cultural Exchange (NCACE)); Marshall, Joe (CEO, The National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB)); Traini, Richard (Head of Operations – Strategic Partnerships, The UK Institute for Technical Skills & Strategy (UK ITSS)); and Viney, Clare (CEO, CRAC-Vitae)	IRI0017
7	Crescenzi, Professor Riccardo (Professor of Economic Geography, London School of Economics and Political Science); and Piazza, Dr Gabriele (Fellow in Economic Geography, London School of Economics and Political Science)	IRI0013
8	Hanley, Dr Bryan	IRI0004
9	JISC	IRI0024
10	Kaczmarek, Sylvester	IRI0022

11	LabCorp	<u>IRI0003</u>
12	National Centre for Universities and Business	<u>IRI0019</u>
13	Northern Health Science Alliance	<u>IRI0016</u>
14	RBG Kew	<u>IRI0026</u>
15	ResearchPlus	<u>IRI0011</u>
16	Royal Academy of Engineering	<u>IRI0007</u>
17	Shabad, Vsevolod	<u>IRI0009</u>
18	The National Measurement Laboratory hosted at LGC	<u>IRI0015</u>
19	The Russell Group	<u>IRI0027</u>
20	The University of Liverpool	<u>IRI0028</u>
21	UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology	<u>IRI0010</u>
22	UK Institute for Technical Skills & Strategy	<u>IRI0014</u>
23	Universities UK	<u>IRI0023</u>
24	University of Bath	<u>IRI0020</u>
25	Wellcome Trust	<u>IRI0012</u>
26	Yorkshire Cancer Research	<u>IRI0008</u>

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

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14th	Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts (2026)	HC 629
13th	Regulation of water, energy and broadband	HC 105
12th	Government compensation schemes	HC 88
11th	Unlocking land for housing	HC 87
10th	Government shared services	HC 85
9th	Large business tax compliance	HC 86
8th	Northern Powerhouse Rail	HC 97
7th	Financial resilience of government-sponsored museums and galleries	HC 96
6th	The Access to Work scheme	HC 92
5th	MoD follow-up Spring 2026	HC 95
4th	Regulating for growth	HC 93
3rd	The MoD's tackling of economic crime and misconduct	HC 91
2nd	NAO financial audit insights 2024–25	HC 94
1st	An analysis of the asylum system	HC 89

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78th	The Bank of England's Real-Time Gross Settlement Renewal Programme	HC 1732
77th	Accountability in small government bodies	HC 887
76th	New Hospital Programme update	HC 1705
75th	Government use of data analytics on error and fraud	HC 891
74th	Environmental regulation	HC 1687
73rd	Financial sustainability of adult hospices in England	HC 1236
72nd	BBC World Service	HC 1299
71st	Government's use of external consultants	HC 1521
70th	Home-to-school transport	HC 1238
69th	Whole of Government Accounts 2023-24	HC 1243
68th	Excess Votes 2024-25	HC 1711
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66th	Tackling fraud and error in benefit expenditure 2024-25	HC 1231
65th	Efficiency and resilience of the Probation Service	HC 1235
64th	Costs of clinical negligence	HC 1234
63rd	Increasing police productivity	HC 1239
62nd	Faulty energy efficiency installations	HC 1229
61st	Financial sustainability of children's care homes	HC 1233
60th	DWP follow-up: Autumn 2025	HC 1447
59th	Ministry of Justice follow-up: Autumn 2025	HC 1240
58th	Government services: Identifying costs	HC 1421
57th	Government services: Generating income	HC 890
56th	BBC Accounts and Trust Statement 2024–25	HC 1230
55th	Reducing NHS waiting times for elective care	HC 820
54th	Afghanistan Response Route	HC 1391
53rd	Cost of maintaining the FCDO's overseas estate	HC 884
52nd	Resilience to threats from animal disease	HC 885
51st	The UK's F-35 stealth fighter capability	HC 1232
50th	Local bus services in England	HC 892
49th	Administration of the Civil Service Pension Scheme	HC 888
48th	Smarter delivery of public services	HC 889

Number	Title	Reference
47th	First Annual Report of the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts	HC 1300
46th	Improving local areas through developer funding	HC 886
45th	Improving family court services for children	HC 883
44th	Governance and decision-making on major projects	HC 642
43rd	MoD's oversight of Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations	HC 893
42nd	Water sector regulation	HC 824
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38th	Increasing teacher numbers: Secondary and further education	HC 825
37th	Immigration: Skilled worker visas	HC 819
36th	Jobcentres	HC 823
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34th	Department for Business and Trade Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24	HC 818
33rd	Supporting the UK's priority industry sectors	HC 1070
32nd	The Future of the Equipment Plan	HC 716
31st	Local Government Financial Sustainability	HC 647
30th	Antimicrobial resistance: addressing the risks	HC 646
29th	Condition of Government property	HC 641
28th	Decommissioning Sellafield	HC 363
27th	Government's relationship with digital technology suppliers	HC 640
26th	Tackling Violence against Women and Girls	HC 644
25th	DHSC Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24	HC 639
24th	Government cyber resilience	HC 643
23rd	The cost of the tax system	HC 645
22nd	Government's support for biomass	HC 715
21st	Fixing NHS Dentistry	HC 648
20th	DCMS management of COVID-19 loans	HC 364
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18th	Use of AI in Government	HC 356
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Number	Title	Reference
15th	Prison estate capacity	HC 366
14th	Public charge points for electric vehicles	HC 512
13th	Improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged children	HC 365
12th	Crown Court backlogs	HC 348
11th	Excess votes 2023-24	HC 719
10th	HS2: Update following the Northern leg cancellation	HC 357
9th	Tax evasion in the retail sector	HC 355
8th	Carbon Capture, Usage and Storage	HC 351
7th	Asylum accommodation: Home Office acquisition of former HMP Northeye	HC 361
6th	DWP Customer Service and Accounts 2023-24	HC 354
5th	NHS financial sustainability	HC 350
4th	Tackling homelessness	HC 352
3rd	HMRC Customer Service and Accounts	HC 347
2nd	Condition and maintenance of Local Roads in England	HC 349
1st	Support for children and young people with special educational needs	HC 353