

Written evidence submitted by The Oxford Trust

The Impact of Coronavirus (CV19) on The Oxford Trust

Background

[The Oxford Trust](#) is a 35-year-old independent charity created by Sir Martin and Lady Audrey Wood who founded the UK's first University spin-out company Oxford Instruments. Its mission is to 'encourage the pursuit of science and enterprise'.

Unlike many charities the Trust has, in normal times, a sustainable business model with surplus revenues created via its two innovation centers in Oxford directed to support both the early stage technology start-up ecosystem and enrich STEM education across Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire. These revenues are supplemented by grants and donations from likeminded organisations and groups.

Although not covering full costs the Trust derives income from its '[Science Oxford](#)' STEM Education programmes through outreach into schools and visits to the new [Science Oxford Centre](#) – a hands on science education enrichment resource including extensive outdoor learning capacity. It is unique to the UK sector.

Like many independent science centres the Trust's centre is not part of the DCMS core portfolio of national museums but it plays a crucial role in communicating and facilitating the understanding of science in all its varied forms to the next generation of researchers, entrepreneurs and leaders across a population of over 1.8 million people.

The Current Situation

Owing to Coronavirus the Science Oxford Centre had to close its doors to every paying school, family and other member of the public until further notice cutting off the entire income almost overnight, from all revenue streams including family ticket sales, events booking, conferencing, school bookings etc. Likewise, the outreach into schools, including our nationally recognised Careers programme in secondary schools.

The Science Oxford centre is very much a cultural resource at the heart of one of the most dynamic of city regions across the UK. Although only in its first year of operation the centre almost double the impact of our STEM programmes reaching over 50,000 individuals areas of science, from health and the environment to physics and technology.

A high proportion of schools were from disadvantaged areas supported by subsidised travel and entrance allowing teachers and pupils to access inspirational facilities & presenters. This is part of a wider plan to create a STEM learning ecosystem, including youth programmes and STEM programmes for families from the most underserved communities.

Financial Impact

Whilst the governments CJRS has been welcomed, and we furloughed 60% of our staff that would otherwise have been made redundant, we are still faced with an income shortfall of around £30,000 per month. This will have a big impact on our reserves and will not be sustainable for very long after the CJRS ends and we either have to cover staff costs again or restructure/close some operations with the resultant job losses.

The Request

Ours is a small centre and is not able to access any other government schemes. Being a charity we are restricted as to the level of debt so we are asking the DCMS, along with BEIS, to consider extending assistance for the major science museums (via Arts Council funding) to cover some of the operational losses suffered by the CV-19 restrictions by supporting the **Emergency Resilience Fund for UK Science Centres** call made by our member organisation, the [Association of Science and Discovery Centres](#) (ASDC). Without this many centres will simply cease to exist after the lockdown ends despite that they will be needed more than ever in promoting the value of science, scientific methods and value to the public.

With this [Emergency Fund](#), the UK Science centres would be in a resilient position for the next 3 months to survive this forced shut down with no income, so they can keep their science centre sites secure, their payroll and HR operating for furloughed staff, deliver any charitable obligations, renegotiate existing contracts and ensure their relationships with schools and communities continue and thrive so they are ready to re-open when the time comes.

Science has driven so much of the UK's COVID-19 response – and Oxford in particular has been front and centre of efforts. This is not the time to lose our Science Centres, large or small, with staff and expertise in these areas. We are needed now more than ever to help people make sense of what is happening and to inspire future generations of scientists, technology experts, mathematicians and engineers, from epidemiologists and vaccine researchers to climate scientists and modelers.

Summary

Along with the UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres we propose that the UK Government takes measures to protect this vital STEM and cultural sector at the heart of communities across the UK that has taken decades to grow, with investment from all sectors, and is considered to be world-leading in innovation and approach. Once lost they cannot be easily replaced.

An investment now would save the sector and the thousands of skilled jobs currently at risk. There has never been a more vital time to protect a sector which brings brilliant science, technology, engineering, and maths, to schools, families and communities across the UK.