**Coronavirus:**

**Proposal for an Emergency Resilience Fund**

**for UK Science Centres**

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Owing to Coronavirus, the UK’s entire lively and successful national network of charitable Science Centres in every city and region of the UK, had to close its doors to every paying school, family and other member of the public until further notice. These robust and entrepreneurial STEM education charities in cities and regions across the UK had their entire incomes cut off overnight, from all revenue streams including family ticket sales, events booking, conferencing, school bookings, car parks, cafes and shops.

These charitable science centres are cultural resources in the hearts of regional cities and towns across the UK. Together they engage 13 million children and adults each year with all areas of science, from health and the environment to physics and technology. They collectively employ over 5000 skilled science educators and support staff and have a turnover of over £200 million. They engage over 7 million girls and women with STEM each year and are the main vital STEM engagement and learning hubs outside London.

These major science and cultural resources with their often iconic infrastructure, are embedded in communities across the UK from Eden Project in Cornwall to Aberdeen Science Centre in Scotland, and from W5 in Belfast, to the National Space Centre in Leicester, Thinktank in Birmingham, Life in Newcastle and Techniquest in Cardiff. They support teachers and schools, families and communities and bring inspirational science to some of the most disadvantaged children in our nation. Around them they have created a wider STEM learning ecosystem, including youth programmes and STEM programmes for families from the most disadvantaged communities.

**To secure their future whilst their income has been cut off, we propose the creation of a National Emergency Resilience Fund for UK Science Centres of £8.3 million per month (£25 million across 3 months) to support the UK Science Centres. This would be needed for as long as Science Centres have to remain closed and the furlough arrangements are in place.**

**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. This is not the time to lose our world-leading Science Centres 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.

# **Overview, data and critical issues**

The UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres has collected data from across the UK Science Centres in two phases to gain a robust picture of the risk level and what is needed. The first phase was before furloughing was announced, the second after.

We asked about staff numbers, numbers of jobs at risk (FTE and individuals), monthly wage bills before and after furloughing, fixed costs to maintain facilities, insurances and the like, and how many staff would need to be retained and not furloughed as part of a resilience team. These teams include, for example minimum numbers from HR, payroll, facilities, leadership teams working from home, digital and others. This forms the basis of our proposal. We should note that the amount proposed is the minimum amount for a 3-month closure period until the end of June, and if further closure was needed it would need to be extended, for example matching the time period of furlough.

In this proposal we focus on the UK-wide national STEM engagement infrastructure of the Science Centres. Our membership includes the main science and natural history museums, largely in London, which reach a further 7 million people. These are DCMS funded and are undertaking their own discussions so not included here.

# **Furloughing**

Furloughing and claiming 80% of salaries has been a lifeline for all these science education charities. Each of these STEM charities took immediate action following the announcement, with around 60% of staff being furloughed immediately to protect the longer-term future of each science centre. This reduced their wage bills considerably, and a number of senior staff also took wage cuts to protect the charities through this difficult time.

However, Science Centres cannot furlough all their staff. They require payroll, HR, facilities, Site Health and Safety, digital, and staff dealing with and renegotiating current contracts and cancelling events, conference bookings at their centres and school bookings. In addition there are fixed costs such as rents, utilities and insurances that must be paid each month.

The UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres has been running weekly zoom meetings with all the CEOs and senior staff across the sector to share approaches, processes and knowledge at this difficult time, in addition to specialist meetings on the impacts of coronavirus on capital build projects, contracts and other matters.

On a separate note, if the furlough rules were relaxed for charities It would also be hugely helpful so staff were able to volunteer a proportion of their time back to their charity, however as long as income is shut off, support will be needed for fixed and other costs.

# **Other Government Support.**

The £160 million offered by Arts Council England is a huge benefit to all the UK Arts organization however, Science Centres are not eligible for this funding. Nor are they able to apply for DCMS funds like our National Museums will be eligible for.

Charities are also not able to take advantage of the generous terms of the business loans, as the rules for charities differ in terms of taking on substantial debt in a climate such as this, as they need to pass the going concern test. Likewise, the Business Rates relief is of limited value as charities already pay only a very small proportion of this. The only UK central funding that has come to science centres in a decade, was secured by ASDC 4 years ago for capital programmes from BEIS, who share so many of our STEM ambitions.

# **The additional impact of Timing**

Science Centres would right now be embarking on their huge Easter holiday programmes, one of their busiest revenue-generating periods of the year, with families paying to bring their children from all across the UK to learn about science, technology, engineering and maths. They will also be closed through the busiest school visit period in May and June, when teachers around the UK take their primary classes out on summer visits for special science curriculum-linked workshops, as well as May half-term. The revenue from this is vital to Science Centres survival.

If this continues for longer, and without the summer holiday revenue, most science centres would not survive the year without Government Support. Alongside this all their STEM community engagement programmes nationally working with some of the most disadvantaged children have had to stop.

# **Summary**

The UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres propose that the UK Government take 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, for £8.3 million per month, would save the sector and the 5000 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.