**Subject: Financial Support for UK Science Centre Network - Question to Parliament**

Dear XX XXXXXX XXXXXXX,

Thank you for agreeing to champion the UK science centres ask to government for an Emergency Resilience Fund. We are very grateful that you have offered to submit a question to Parliament on behalf of our sector. I have attempted to summarise our ask as this:

“The UK science centre network is world leading, it promotes adult engagement with science and it inspires and enables children to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, which is essential for our nation’s economy and resilience. Science centres are charities and cultural hubs, in cities and regions across the country, which have now ceased operation due to Coronavirus. Science centres receive no government funding and are not eligible for the Coronavirus support packages that the government has made available to museums, arts organisations, zoos and charities. Without a support package they will not survive the coming months. Will government provide an Emergency Resilience Fund of £25 million for UK science centres? This will ensure that science centres can continue their vital role connecting science and society, now and in the future.”

What are the next steps? Is it sufficient to send you this question by this email or do we need to submit it to you by another means?

We The Curious is part of this network of science centres, as coordinated by the UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres (ASDC). It is the ASDC that would be recipients of an Emergency Resilience Fund from government, and they would distribute it to the membership accordingly. Whilst our ask is directed towards government in general, ASDC has identified BEIS as the department most likely to support us as they provided some capital development money four years ago (money that will have been wasted if the science centres collapse). The danger is that no government department recognises that they ‘own’ the science centre sector, but BEIS is our closest link as science centres facilitate the vital STEM careers pipeline from childhood to adulthood, which is so critical to BEIS’ ambitions.

Below is a more detailed justification of the request from We The Curious’ perspective, which has been sent to other local MPs. Attached is a more detailed proposal of the Emergency Resilience Fund from ASDC, along a map of the science centre network and a Parliamentary Review on the work of We The Curious specifically.

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Dear Member of Parliament,

I am the CEO of We The Curious, an educational charity and science centre on Bristol’s harbourside. Every year we engage half a million visitors with science; connecting families, schools and disadvantaged communities with academia and industry. We aim to promote the role of science in society and to inspire the next generation of British innovators, doctors and world-leading researchers.

The Coronavirus pandemic caused us to close to the public on 18 March and since then our income has ceased. As a charity we are now depleting our limited reserves to meet the costs of our workforce, buildings and public spaces, overheads and contracts. Without financial support we, like many other UK science centres, will cease to exit. We are a vital resource to society; during this crisis by engaging thousands of schoolchildren and adult learners with science online, and after the crisis when our work to educate, inspire and inform the public will be more relevant than ever.

You may have heard recently that we are asking for the government’s rules on furlough to be changed so that charity staff can continue to work towards social good whilst on furlough support. Furlough is a vital lifeline as it allows us to support 80% of the salary of about 75% of our workforce, but furlough is only half the picture for us. The other half of the picture is that we need additional funding to meet the critical costs of our estate and overheads. For this we are joining with the other science centres around the UK, though our professional body the Association for Science and Discovery centres (ASDC), to request an Emergency Resilience Fund from the government.

Science centres nationally engage 13 million people a year. They are an iconic part of the country’s cultural landscape and a trusted source of science engagement for adults and communities. Most importantly, they play a vital role in enabling young people to pursue science, which is essential for our nation’s future resilience. Evidence shows that science centres nurture children’s interest in science and engineering careers. The UK’s future economic growth and global standing depends on us building a world-leading knowledge-intensive economy underpinned by a skilled STEM workforce.

But despite all this, science centres fall through a gap in the financial supports made available by government during the Coronavirus crisis. We are not eligible to receive the money that has been allocated to keep arts organisations and museums afloat. We cannot access the funds recently created to protect zoos. We are not eligible for the money provided to support charities as we do not qualify as ‘frontline’. We cannot benefit from the support made available to commercial businesses. Our sector finds itself without any support, which is why we are proposing the creation of the Emergency Resilience Fund for UK Science Centres; to recognise our value to society, to recognise that none of the existing support packages apply to us, and to recognise that we need urgent financial help to survive this lockdown period.

On our behalf the ASDC is asking for £25 million for three months (£8.3 million a month) for our entire sector. Full details of this fund are in the attached proposal. In the last decade the only government support for science centres has come from BEIS, and so we turn to BEIS now for this emergency resilience fund, but our ask is to government in general. Since the millennium, various government departments and bodies have supported science centres, through money and other means. It has taken years to build the world-leading science centre network we have today. But soon this will all be wasted as, without emergency support, the nation’s science centres will cease to exist during the next few months.

We ask for your help to share, support and commend our plea to government; to BEIS or whichever departments may be able to help us. Our hope is that if enough people realise that science centres are at risk of disappearing, recognise the value of science centres to our nation’s economy, culture and resilience, and call on the government to provide the £25 million that we collectively need to survive this crisis, then science centres will remain a cherished part of life in the UK for millions of children and adults, for years to come.

Thank you,

Donna Speed

**Attachments:**

* Proposal by ASDC to government for the creation of an Emergency Resilience Fund for UK Science Centres
* A map of the ASDC network
* A Parliamentary Review on the work of We The Curious in Bristol

**Links:**

* We The Curious: <https://www.wethecurious.org/>
* ASDC: <https://www.sciencecentres.org.uk/>

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