



The UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres
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8th October 2020

An open letter to the Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak, and Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Alok Sharma requesting an Emergency Resilience Fund of £25 million to secure the future of the UK's Science Centres

Dear Sirs,

The future of the UK's world-class network of Science and Discovery Centres is at imminent risk and we are facing the loss of inclusive and accessible science learning for millions of children and adults nationally. This is at a time when economic growth through science and innovation is a key national priority and when meaningful public engagement with STEM has never been more important.

For over 20 years our nation's regional Science and Discovery Centres have played a crucial role in the whole country's STEM success, delivering inspirational science learning to children and schools, and working in partnership with local communities. Outside London, Science and Discovery Centres in Newcastle, Merseyside, Yorkshire, Leicester, Belfast, Glasgow, Wales and other regions inspire over eight million schoolchildren and adults every year.

If the UK is to achieve the impressive ambitions outlined in our government's industrial strategy, and develop future leaders of the global scientific and R&D communities, we need to continue to inspire young people across our country to become the STEM innovators and entrepreneurs of tomorrow.

Science and Discovery Centres excel at delivering this inspiration. They run science programmes covering everything from spaceports to climate change, providing access to the world of STEM for children and families. They are the meeting place between scientists, industry, and the public, and work with Research Councils, Learned Societies, the UK Space Agency, universities and business to bring the latest brilliant science to millions of people.

Before COVID-19, the UK's Science and Discovery Centres were all successful, entrepreneurial, lean independent charities. When we closed our doors in March, most of us saw our income instantly cut off. As things stand today, 96% of Science and Discovery Centres say they cannot cover costs when they reopen as their capacities are reduced by up to 75% to enable social distancing.

We, like so many UK businesses, have benefited from the government's valued job retention scheme and reduced VAT. Many Science Centres have made significant staff redundancies and taken out loans. However, Science Centres are also charities, with science and environmental education and public engagement missions. Surely we want to protect this precious national asset to continue to engage young people with science for years to come, contributing to the future success of the UK.

It was deeply disappointing to learn that Science and Discovery Centres had been largely excluded from the remarkable government support being made available to other cultural organisations in similar dire straits. Science and Discovery Centres work to place science at the heart of our culture in the UK, and yet were largely excluded from the arts, heritage and culture rescue package of £1.57 billion.

We know that our network makes a big impact. We know that we are at the forefront of supporting STEM learning. We know that we bring value, opportunity and enrichment to every region of the UK and that together we introduce millions of children to science each year.

What we do not know is why you, our government, would allow this valuable and viable national STEM asset to fall through the cracks, putting this network, and all it delivers, in such jeopardy. Despite our national *Science Centres For Our Future* campaign, the 190+ letters written to MPs, and our repeated representations to BEIS and DCMS, our message still appears not to have been heard.

This is why we, as CEOs, Chairs, Trustees, eminent Scientists, science businesses, Mayors, MPs and University Vice Chancellors are writing to implore you to listen in our time of need, to invest £25 million as an Emergency Resilience Fund to help UK Science and Discovery Centres weather this pandemic and continue to provide the backbone of exploratory science education across the country.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Penny Fidler
CEO

UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres



Ben Ward

Chair of Trustees

UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres
CEO Winchester Science Centre

Signed by:

[Leading Scientists and Academics](#)

Sir Venki Ramakrishnan FRS PRS, Nobel Prize winner, President of The Royal Society

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Professor Tomas Lindahl FRS FMedSci, Nobel Prize winner, Emeritus Scientist, The Francis Crick Institute

Sir Paul Nurse FRS FMedSci HonFEng HonFBA MAE, Nobel Prize winner, Director of The Francis Crick Institute

Sir Richard Roberts FRS, Nobel Prize winner, Chief Scientific Officer at New England Biolabs

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Sir Gregory Winter CBE FRS FMedSci, Nobel Prize winner, Emeritus Professor, MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge

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Helen Sharman CMG, OBE, HonFRSC, British Astronaut

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Professor Brian Cox OBE FRS, The Royal Society Professor for Public Engagement in Science and Professor of Particle Physics at University of Manchester

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Professor Alice Roberts, Patron of ASDC, Professor of Public Engagement with Science at University of Birmingham

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Sharon Davies, Chief Executive, Young Enterprise

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Justin Madders, Shadow Health Secretary, Labour MP for Ellesmere Port & Neston
Rt Hon Esther McVey, Conservative MP for Tatton
Stephen Metcalfe, Conservative MP for South Basildon & East Thurrock
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Professor Sir Martin Sweeting, Chair, National Space Centre, Leicester
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Cornwall
Clairette Arram, Governance and Risk Manager, Royal Institution, London
Helen Jones, Director of Global Engagement and Strategy, **The Science Museum Group** (Science
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Museum, Bradford; National Railway Museum, York; Locomotion, Shildon)
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Scot Owen, CEO, Xplore! Science Discovery Centre, Wrexham, North Wales
Lynda Powell, Chair, Xplore! Science Discovery Centre, Wrexham, North Wales