



3 July 2020

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Dear Sam

### **Britain - building back better: advice on university-business links**

1. I welcome and support NCUB's recent campaign to strengthen ties between universities and businesses, building on long-standing partnerships and new links formed in heat of the covid19 crisis, to work together for the country's economic recovery. I would welcome NCUB's further contribution in two ways:
  - Your commitment to provide UKRI including Research England with evidence and insights on the progress of universities and businesses in working through their stability toward greater contribution to the nation's recovery.
  - Your advice on how we should tackle key challenges as set out in the UK Government's Research and Development Roadmap in relation to university-business linkages.
2. This advice would help me in my role as Research England Executive Chair overseeing investment in university research and knowledge exchange, in my role as one of the Senior Responsible Officers for UKRI's commercialisation strategic development and as UKRI lead on place, and in my membership of the Government's ministerial task force for research and knowledge exchange sustainability.

### From stability to recovery

3. It is clear to us all that there are currently enormous pressures on businesses, and on universities. These may only intensify as we move through the phases of crisis and recovery, though hopefully reaching normalisation and, finally, a new impetus toward greater innovation and aspiration.

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4. We could all become closed in our focus on our own problems. But the present spirit of community commitment to tackle the virus drives us all to the belief that we will only progress and prosper by looking outward and working together.
5. In these difficult circumstances, evidence is vitally important – providing the right data from the right parties at the right time can underpin effective decision-making. I welcome NCUB's continued focus as a key engagement and analytical hub, drawing on insights and evidence across universities/research/business and uniting policy and practice. Also, the continuing developments to the konfer platform to support digital connections and provide key data analytical tools. I also welcome your working with the Centre for Business Research on the business motivations survey, your new partnership with the University Commercialisation and Innovation policy evidence unit at the University of Cambridge.
6. I understand you have agreed a programme and schedule with UKRI on the NCUB's contribution to the national evidence and insight effort.

Policy advice: delivering the ambition in the UK Government's Research and Development roadmap

7. Alongside better evidence, I would particularly value your bringing together the expert insights from the strategic network of NCUB members, together with appropriate other leading experts to form a taskforce. The taskforce could distil some of the evidence above and provide insights to calibrate key challenges, likely timelines and opportunities to do better working together. The advice of the taskforce would be most valuable set in the context of the UK Government's R&D roadmap, which sets a long-term and important ambition that will have very significant implications for universities, businesses and the country as a whole. There will be a wide range of Government and other exercises to gather evidence and views on these proposals, but I would be grateful for your advice and recommendations specifically on the implications for businesses and universities working together in relation to:
  - Successes and learning from the crisis: particularly how to continue the openness, connectivity and pace of collaboration from the crisis;
  - How value can be captured from the significant increases in discovery research proposed, including the implications of "moonshots";
  - Increasing diversity, particularly in R&D&I leadership;
  - Supporting the whole innovation system, particularly to attract greater private investment – where are the gaps, opportunities and priorities that could be enabled by better university-business working;

- How to identify and strengthen the most important international partnerships;
- Ensuring the UK is renowned as a place for innovators and entrepreneurs; and communicating the excitement behind the vision;
- Maintaining and further advancing the UK's high level talent capabilities and capacity needed to drive a research and innovation powered economy.

8. I would be grateful for your proposals on how to put together this advice, including composition of the taskforce and working methods, as well as on timing and nature of outputs.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Sweeney', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

David Sweeney  
Executive Chair, Research England