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**Balance and effectiveness of research and innovation spending inquiry**

1. **Introduction**

1.1 Coventry University is one of the country’s leading 'modern universities', with over 60,000 students globally and a robust academic presence regionally, nationally and across the world.

1.2 Coventry University welcomes the government commitment to increasing public spending on research and innovation. Our corporate strategy [‘Creating Better Futures”](http://creatingbetterfutures.coventry.ac.uk/) enshrines a commitment to a thriving research environment where strategic institutional support enables University and Faculty Research Centres to grow challenge led and multidisciplinary research which incorporates teaching, addresses social challenges and fosters collaboration with places of excellence that share our values.

1.3 As an “innovative, enterprising and entrepreneurial” university group, Coventry is business engaged and strives to develop strategic level collaboration with businesses on a local, national and global scale. Indeed, our Vice-Chancellor, Professor John Latham, sits on the board of Innovate UK; reflecting a commitment to delivering support to the largest corporates to the small and medium sized enterprises which are a central part of our local and national economies.

1.4 In this response, we demonstrate the effectiveness of public funding on R&D in supporting Coventry University’s place-based approach to addressing economic and social challenges.

1.5 We call for the strengthening of interdisciplinary research in reviewing mechanisms – highlighting that grand challenges are not solved by one discipline or within one Research Excellence Framework (REF) unit of assessment.

1.6 We support the continuation of the dual support system and demonstrate its effectiveness through the Coventry strategic approach to QR funding, whilst highlighting the need for greater flexibility and trust in how the funding is used by universities.

1.7 Coventry University would welcome the opportunity to give oral evidence or host a select committee visit in response to this consultation.

**2.** ***The effectiveness of public spending on R&D, including through mechanisms such as the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund;***

2.1 Coventry University believes that public spending on R&D through mechanisms such as the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) is critical to the Coventry University’s place-based approach to addressing economic and social challenges.

2.2 Public funding of Research & Development enables the University to develop areas of excellence across the institution in a much more flexible way. At Coventry University we pursue a strategy of linking skills provision to industry needs and have demonstrated the way in which public investment can deliver a return on investment - delivering benefits to the regional and national economy (See Case Study 1 – Page 4).

2.3 With the Industrial Strategy Grand Callenges, and the continued development of a Local Industrial Strategy for the West Midlands, the recent funding allocations have enabled the University to refine its activities; aligning with and directly supporting these initiatives for the benefit of the region:

* **Meeting business needs for talent, skills and labour** – reflecting the technical education focus (and supporting the OfS to develop ‘new and alternative forms of provision’), Coventry University is a partner in the [MIRA Technology Institute](https://miratechnologyinstitute.co.uk/about-mti/) (MTI); a unique collaboration creating a global skills centre to meet demand for specialist skills in the automotive sector.
* **Creating more people skilled in science, technology, engineering and maths:** our new [Institute for Future Transport and Cities](https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/areas-of-research/institute-for-future-transport-and-cities/) works across the core themes of: training and skills development, research to demonstrate new technologies, and commercialisation of new technology. This new Institute builds on our strategic partnerships with organisations such as Unipart, [HORIBA MIRA](https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directories/research-news/2015/horiba-mira-collaboration-with-coventry-university/) and [FEV](https://www.coventry.ac.uk/primary-news/universitys-30m-clean-powertrain-deal-with-german-global-engineering-service-provider-shows-confidence-in-uk-industry/) and delivers research and training that links with the Industrial Strategy.
* **Narrow disparities between communities in skills and education:** we are improving access to education and strengthening community cohesion through: Coventry University Social Enterprise ([CUSE](https://www.coventry.ac.uk/cuse/)) and [Fab Lab Coventry](http://www.covfablab.org.uk/what-is-a-fablab/), and the €4m [MiFriendly Cities](https://www.mifriendlycities.co.uk/) project - supporting refugees and migrants’ involvement in community and social enterprise projects.
* **Equip citizens for jobs shaped by next generation technology:** Weare developing a series of diagnostics workshops with employers, to understand current and future skills needs and reflect these in our activities; supporting workers and employers to respond to the changing workplace and the resulting digital skills needs.This builds on assets including the [Centre for Connected and Autonomous Automotive Research (C-CAAR)](https://www.coventry.ac.uk/primary-news/horiba-mira-and-coventry-university-launch-autonomous-vehicle-research-centre/) - a joint Coventry University and HORIBA MIRA initiative supporting research.

**3. I*ndividual research disciplines, research councils and cross-disciplinary schemes;***

3.1 Coventry University agrees that UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is an effective mechanism in this regard. However, there is some need to strengthen representation of interdisciplinary research in reviewing strategies.

3.2 Almost 70% of Coventry University’s 2014 [REF submission](http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/Results.aspx?HEI=55) was interdisciplinary. Meanwhile, [HEFCE analysis](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2015/interdisc/) of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) shows that, when academics submitted research to REF that had significant impact outside academia, around 80% were interdisciplinary. Yet, items submitted to discipline-based REF panels under-represented the quantity of top interdisciplinary research published by UK researchers in a range of fields.

3.3. Balance is of course is necessary in order to strengthen knowledge within a discipline before that knowledge can be taken to the interdisciplinary level. However, real world problems are not solved from within one REF unit of assessment.

***4.* The rationale needed for deciding on the balance of public R&D funding between: *Pure and applied research;***

4.1 The balance between pure and applied research funding has functioned successfully – however, it is vital that excellence is funded *wherever* excellence is found.

***5.* The rationale needed for deciding on the balance of public R&D funding between: *The two research funding streams of the ‘dual support’ system***

5.1 Coventry University supports the ‘dual support’ system. It enables the University to be strategic and holistic in its approach by linking research development, Research and Innovation Strategy and relationships with industry. However, we ask the inquiry to highlight that Universities should be trusted to spend such funding wisely.

5.2 At Coventry University, QR funding is used to strategically invest for future development, rather than assign it as a reflection of past performance. Decisions are taken at senior level, in consultation with faculty leadership and researchers through the five-year growth strategy for research; funds are then distributed across all faculties and departments. Meanwhile, the Deputy-Vice Chancellor retains a small central fund that is targeted toward cross-university strategic needs (See Case Study 2, Page 4)

5.4 Given the relatively small amount of QR funding that Coventry received historically, strategic implementation is undoubtedly the most efficient and effective use of it. Indeed, our approach to research and QR funding has delivered a significant improvement in Research Excellence Framework results, with the proportion of researched assessed as 3\* or 4\* rising from 27% in 2008 to 61% in REF 2014. We therefore recommend that the dual support continues to enable the growth of future research.

**6. Case Studies**

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| **CASE STUDY 1:**  **Institute for Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering**  AME is a large-scale collaboration between Coventry University and Unipart Manufacturing Group. The AME building is a facility supported by HEFCE’s Catalyst Fund (£7.9m), located at the Unipart Powertrain Applications manufacturing site in Coventry. Designed as a bespoke ‘Faculty on the Factory Floor’, it is underpinned by a shared focus on teaching and skills, high-quality research and the core business of developing and applying energy and powertrain related technologies for the automotive, aerospace, oil and gas, rail and renewables industry sectors. The partnership involved considerable investment from both sides. Unipart contributes £17.9 million towards the partnership and a further £6.5 million towards student scholarships and product research and investment. |

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| **CASE STUDY 2:**  **Supporting Postgraduate students in Industry for Employability in Research (SPIDER)**  Coventry has used its QR income to co-fund industry PhD student placements in industry, via the ‘SPIDER’ scheme. The project aims to support PGR students in completing placements with organisations in their field, either nationally or internationally. The project is open to all PGR students.  In 2016/17 the university funded 13 projects with thirteen different private sector partners, some with additional funding by the external partners. |

**ENDwith industry while nurturing new skills among**

its students.