

Research News Digest

(15 June 2012)

Research Councils

EPSRC SUPERGEN Call

EPSRC are inviting proposals for collaborative research projects to undertake fundamental research that will advance Solar energy technology towards deployment. The Institutions involved in the successful application(s) will be expected to become associate members of the SUPERGEN Solar energy Hub. Up to £5M is available for this call which closes on 23rd August. Anyone intending to submit a proposal to this call must register their interest by 13th July 2012. **Wendy Flavell (Physics) is leading on this.**

<http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/funding/calls/open/Pages/solarenergychallenge.aspx>

NERC Peer Review College changes

NERC is introducing a range of measures to increase confidence in its peer-review process. It has recently moved from a Peer Review College membership selection process based on self-nomination to one that includes a focused nomination process. The additional change that will be introduced from 2013 is to increase the proportion of College members that are active grant holders, on the grounds that being a Principal Investigator of a NERC grant is generally a strong indicator of high-quality scientific judgement. In order to achieve this, a new condition will be introduced to all newly awarded NERC research grants and fellowships. Failure to accept membership without adequate reason, or unsatisfactory performance as a Peer Review College member, could lead to the application of sanctions in the form of withdrawal of eligibility to apply for NERC research grants for a period of 12 months. For joint grants the condition will apply to the Principal Investigators of all components. Only selected Principal Investigators will be invited to join the NERC College in areas where a strengthening in their area of expertise is required.

<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/assessment/peerreview/>

ESRC Council notes

The notes of the ESRC Council meeting on the 20 April have been made available. Council discussed how it might encourage greater innovation in applications and endorsed the proposal to re-launch funding opportunities emphasising their transformative potential. Members discussed and agreed to proceed with the proposal for a pilot programme of prizes to further signal the ESRC intent to support transformative research. Council also approved funding of £9 million from the ESRC Venture budget for a third phase of the joint programme, with DfID, on Poverty Alleviation Research. It was suggested that volunteering be included in the thematic steers for phase 3. Council also agreed to commit £2 million in the first instance to a programme of work related to the planned referendum on Scottish independence.

http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/Summary-of-council-meeting-20-Apr-2012_tcm8-21383.pdf

STFC Programmatic Review

The STFC programme will be reviewed from June 2012 to September 2013 by its Science Board (UoM member - George Lafferty from the School of Physics). The Programmatic Review is designed to inform planning decisions and to help optimise excellent science and impact in any financial

scenario In the event of greater or smaller financial resources being available, decisions will need to take into account excellence, balance, costs, and spend profile in a way that goes beyond considering just raw ratings. The Terms of Reference for the review and Programmatic Review Process Flow and Timescales are available to view.

<http://www.stfc.ac.uk/38855.aspx>

STFC Council Update

STFC Council met on 24 May. Issues considered included plans to invest the £20m capital assigned to STFC in the March Budget statement (£10m earmarked for growth initiatives at Daresbury) and cross Research Council work to implement a large facilities funding model for the UK. Council also discussed at length the advice received from the Science Board on options for restructuring the Council's science advisory board structure. Whilst supportive of the need to simplify the advisory structure, some details remain unresolved and therefore a working party consisting of members from Science Board, Council and the Executive was established to refine the proposals and report back to Council at the next meeting.

<http://www.stfc.ac.uk/About+STFC/34873.aspx>

Government/Funding Council

Launch of the Future Cities Demonstrator and Catapult

The Technology Strategy Board has launched the feasibility stage of the £25 million Future Cities Demonstrator Programme, together with the Future Cities Catapult vision and scope. The funding will be awarded to the city or urban area in the UK that submits the best proposal for a large scale 'future cities demonstrator', showing how the city's multiple systems will be integrated and how challenges in the city will be addressed. Local governments and local authorities will be invited to initially bid for one of twenty £50,000 grants to carry out a feasibility study and to develop their demonstrator project proposal. The cities that have completed the feasibility study will then be invited to submit a proposal for the large scale demonstrator – and one successful city will be awarded £24m funding to implement their proposal.

<https://connect.innovateuk.org/web/future-cities-special-interest-group/overview>

BIS CaSE Roundtable Presentation

Graeme Reid , Head of Research funding at BIS, gave a presentation to a CaSE Roundtable at the end of May entitled 'Public Spending on Science and Research'.

<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=13122>

BIS updates Business Plan

The annual update of the BIS Business Plan has been published. The Business Plan has now rebadged Knowledge & Innovation (promote excellent universities and research and increased business innovation) as a Coalition Priority with a budget of £11.8 billion (down £600m from last year). New to the Business Plan is the £100 million matching capital funding via HEFCE. Projects will be awarded in March 2013.

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/docs/b/12-p58-bis-2012-business-plan>

Government responds to consultation on Higher Education White Paper

BIS has published its response to the consultation on the Higher Education White Paper, published in June last year. There was concern amongst respondents about a perceived lack of attention given in the White Paper to postgraduate students. Respondents feared that the new funding system would lead to a drop in demand for postgraduate study arising from the high levels of debt students will already have accrued as undergraduates. They emphasised that the impact of the new funding system on postgraduate participation needed to be monitored. The response reiterates the announcement made by HEFCE of its intention to take the lead on gathering evidence to improve understanding of the purpose and characteristics of, and outcomes from, postgraduate participation. <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/g/12-890-government-response-students-and-regulatory-framework-higher-education>

BIS publish early assessment of UK Innovation Fund

BIS has published an early stage assessment of the likely economic effectiveness of the UK Innovation Investment Fund (UKIIF), launched in June 2009. Government investment of £150 million was matched with private sector funding, providing the UKIIF with £330 million to invest at final closing. The report concludes that UKIIF is strongly addressing the gap in the supply of equity finance and is still required today, as few private sector UK institutions focus on VC market investment. UKIIF appears to be focusing on early stage businesses requiring finance for R&D in key sectors (e.g. clean technology, life sciences, advanced manufacturing) and initial evidence suggests that the likely overall impact on business development appears greater than its investment level s. <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/enterprise/docs/e/12-815-early-assessment-uk-innovation-investment-fund>

IPO expands its Patent Opinions Service and consults on Mediation Service

The Hargreaves Review of Intellectual Property and Growth, published in May 2011, identified a number of barriers facing SMEs trying to making the most of their Intellectual Property. One of these was the cost of managing IP, in particular resolving disputes surrounding the enforcement of their own IP rights and defending themselves against allegations of infringement made by others. The Intellectual Property Office has reviewed its Patent Opinions Service with a view to expanding the service. The IPO also provides a Mediation Service. However, uptake of this service is low and the IPO is therefore seeking comments and supporting evidence from key stakeholders and IP right holders on the reasons for this. This will be used to determine what service, if any, the IPO should be offering to support speedier and lower cost dispute resolution.

<http://www.ipo.gov.uk/pro-policy/consult/consult-live/consult-2012-opinion.htm>

<http://www.ipo.gov.uk/types/hargreaves/hargreaves-innovation.htm>

Academies

RAENG makes case for Centres of Excellence in sustainable building design

The Royal Academy of Engineering has published a report presenting the outcome of an exercise to establish the costs and benefits for the UK economy of creating a network of centres of excellence in integrated, sustainable design for construction. The centres would promote knowledge, teaching and research in sustainable and low carbon design techniques and the application of technologies for the benefit of the UK low carbon construction industry. The report recommends that the Government should commit investment to set up and provide pump-priming funding for at least

four Centres of Excellence hosted by universities with an established record of multidisciplinary teaching for architects and engineers, expertise in building physics and an established record of engagement with the construction industry. It also recommends that RCUK should commit funding for interdisciplinary research in low carbon building design, occupant behaviour and construction techniques that are available to a much broader range research endeavours, both commercial and academic, rather than the narrow fields of research presently funded.

http://www.raeng.org.uk/news/publications/list/reports/Centres_of_Excellence_report.pdf

Royal Society looking at increased diversity in scientific workforce

The Royal Society has announced a new BIS-funded programme focused on increasing diversity in the scientific workforce. The programme, run over four years, has total funding of £700,000. The Royal Academy of Engineering is running a similar programme. The new stream of work will focus on understanding the character and make-up of the scientific workforce, and look at ways to remove barriers to entry and progression so as to lead to an increase in diversity in both academia and industry. The programme will be focusing on gender, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status. Professor Dame Julia Higgins will chair the steering group. The Royal Society will also shortly launch a new 18-month policy study to run alongside the programme. Possible areas of focus may include: the business case for diversity in the workforce; how much more effective are diverse teams; and how can organisations enable diversity. The study will investigate both the academic and industrial sectors.

Publishing

UKPMC releases Evidence Finder upgrade

After a trial period UKPubMed Central has now launched its EvidenceFinder tool. EvidenceFinder is intended to enriches UKPMC literature searches by suggesting questions alongside search results, providing a way to find information buried in full text articles that is directly relevant. This provides a serendipitous browsing capability, which helps identify articles and research that might have been overlooked through direct key word searching.

http://labs.ukpmc.ac.uk/FAQ#evf_002

Crossref launches FundRef pilot

CrossRef has announced the launch of FundRef, a pilot collaboration between scholarly publishers and funding agencies that will standardise the names of research funders and add grant numbers attributed in journal articles or other scholarly documents. The collaboration would allow researchers, publishers, and funding agencies to track the published research that results from specific funding bodies. The international FundRef pilot participants include seven publishers (American Institute of Physics, American Psychological Association, Elsevier, IEEE, Nature Publishing Group, Oxford University Press, and Wiley) and four funding organizations (US Department of Energy, Office of Scientific and Technical Information; NASA; National Science Foundation; and the Wellcome Trust). The participants in the pilot project plan to create a proof of concept system that will demonstrate the workflow for how funding agency names and grant and award numbers will be standardized and linked to publications. The proof of concept should be available by October 2012.

<http://www.crossref.org/fundref/>

Other

The UK's thirty year experiment in innovation policy

Richard Jones, Professor of Physics and the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation at the University of Sheffield has written an insightful overview of UK innovation policy. Over the last thirty years, the research intensity of the UK's university sector has increased, from 0.32% of GDP to 0.48% of GDP. This is at the high end of international comparisons, but where the UK is very much an outlier is in the proportion of the country's research that takes place in universities. This proportion now stands at 26%, which is much higher than international competitors. Richard concludes that this is as much a measure of the weakness of the government and corporate applied and strategic research sectors as the strength of its HE research enterprise. He is concerned that, given the hollowed-out state of the business and government R&D sectors, universities won't be able to meet the expectations being placed on them.

<http://www.softmachines.org/wordpress/?p=1213>

CaSE comments on the reform of the House of Lords

The Campaign for Science and Engineering has published a report which considers the potential implications of reform on the current level of science and engineering expertise in the House of Lords. The report recommends that the proportion of the House which is appointed should be at least 30% and sought from areas where expertise is found to be lacking. It also recommends that the House of Lords should seek to employ more staff with backgrounds in science and engineering.

<http://blog.sciencecampaign.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/House-of-Lords-Reform-and-Expertise4.pdf>

New Calls

MAJOR & CROSS-FACULTY RESEARCH INITIATIVES

Deadline	Funding Body	Scheme/Bid
18 June	EPSRC	Additional Sponsorship (Internal)
4 July	EPSRC	Catalysis Technology Hubs
10 July	Royal Society	Wolfson Research Merit Awards
16 July	CRC/EPSRC	Cancer Imaging Initiative
16 August	EPSRC	SUPERGEN Hydrogen & Fuel Cells Challenge
5 Sept	TSB/NDA/EPSRC/DECC	Developing the civil nuclear power supply chain
17 Oct	ERC	Starting Grants
22 Nov	ERC	Advanced Grants
10 Jan 2013	ERC	Synergy Grants
21 Feb 2013	ERC	Consolidator Grants
24 Apr 2013	ERC	Proof of concept