

Dear FT letters editor

Chris Patten makes some excellent points in his article, 'UK funding cuts are a slap in the face for science' [FT7 April 2021], about science funding, both outward investment through the ODA and inward investment through the EU Horizon programme. These programmes both recognise what this government seems not to - that the best science is done by the best teams working internationally, and that cooperation is a two-way street. For future generations to prosper we need to take every advantage of science and technology; that means the government needs to support and invest in leading edge science at home and abroad.

It is well known in economic literature that many of the most significant new products have come about through government programmes. A few examples: Teflon, the Internet, smartphones, drones - all use technologies from government funded programmes. And of course COVID vaccines. 'Tech giants' don't invest in fundamental science - governments do.

Our future is likely to be dominated by growth in artificial intelligence, genetics, materials technology, sustainability - and technologies that we don't know exist yet. To be successful in this new world we will need scientists and engineers who have been involved at the cutting edge, otherwise we won't be able to keep up. It's a sad fact that the UK doesn't have the capability to build a nuclear power station- our current generation of scientists just hasn't got the background and experience any more.

This isn't about government 'picking winners' in an industrial strategy; it's about laying foundations that need to run alongside our education system to encourage bright minds to aspire to careers in science whereby society as a whole benefits. If we're to break out of the situation which has arisen over the last 10 years where productivity growth has been effectively zero, we need innovation to be at the top of our agenda.

So, before we become a nation of minimum wage baristas and delivery drivers, let's remember that science is a team sport, and that to succeed we need to be part of the team. We owe it to future generations.

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