

Institute of Physics

21 November 2006

Professor Philip Gummett
Chief Executive
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Linden Court
Illex Close
Llanishen
Cardiff CF14 5DZ

Dear Professor Gummett

Funding of physics departments in Wales

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) recently announced an additional £75 million in funding to support the teaching of science subjects that are strategically important to the economy and society. This increase, of around 20%, is consistent with the average shortfall in the funding of physics teaching in England, as identified by the Institute of Physics in its recent study of the *Finances of Physics Departments in English Universities*¹. The Institute has welcomed this announcement and will continue to work closely with HEFCE in order to increase participation in physics-based courses in higher education (HE) and to broaden the pool of entrants to physics-based courses in HE.

However, the Institute is becoming increasingly concerned about the difference in the funding level of physics between England and Wales. Data from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)² shows that in 2004/05 Welsh Universities obtained over a £1200 less per student than Scottish universities and over £500 less per student than England. However, the additional money announced by HEFCE will result in an increase in the HEFCE teaching grant by approximately 20% (or by one thousand pounds per student) from 2007-08. This means that, unless there are changes to the HEFCW funding level for teaching, physics departments in Wales will be receiving over a £1500 less per student than their English counterparts.

Furthermore, in the current climate, increasing numbers of students choose to live at home while studying at university³. It is therefore important that there is a geographical spread of physics departments across the UK in order to maintain regional provision of physics. With only three physics departments in Wales it is even more important that the departments are funded fully, especially while the effects of a change in costing research occurs. A lower student population in Wales results in less science teachers teaching in Wales which has a detrimental impact on the Welsh economy as a whole.

It is a great disappointment that no initiatives are being undertaken in Wales to further participation in physics and to fund physics to the level at which it can thrive. The current variation in the level of funding of physics between England and Wales will have a long-term effect on the research base. The Institute would welcome an

¹ http://www.iop.org/Our_Activities/Science_Policy/Publications/file_6598.pdf

² A Comparison of Funding in Wales and England
http://194.81.48.132/FinanceAssurance_Docs/The_Funding_Gap_2004_05_-_main_content.pdf

³ http://www.natwest.com/global_options.asp?id=GLOBAL/MEDIA/135

opportunity to meet and discuss how we could work together on any initiatives that you are planning.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Kirby-Harris', with a long, sweeping horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Robert Kirby-Harris CPhys FInstP
Chief Executive