

# UK government announces research-spending hike ahead of budget

**Pledge would raise country's public research funding to £12.5 billion in 2021–22.**

**Elizabeth Gibney**

20 November 2017

The UK government seems to be making good on its promises to increase research spending significantly over the next decade.

In an announcement on 20 November, the government said that it would boost public spending on research and development (R&D) to £12.5 billion (US\$16.5 billion) in 2021–22, an increase of £500 million on what is planned for the year before. The hike builds on a surprise announcement made last year, when politicians promised yearly increases in research funding until 2020.

According to the London-based Campaign for Science and Engineering (CASE), the increase puts the United Kingdom on track to hit a government target to raise combined public and private spending on R&D to 2.4% of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2027.

That would be a huge uptick in spending for Britain: the most recent figures show that the country spent just 1.7% of its GDP on R&D in 2015, compared with 2.9% in Germany and 2.8% in the United States.

Hitting the target will also require private investment in R&D to rise, and some researchers had wondered whether the United Kingdom would rely on private spending to boost its budget past

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2020. But writing in the *Times* newspaper to accompany the announcement — which came two days before the release of Britain’s annual budget — Prime Minister Theresa May confirmed that the government planned to increase its public spending on R&D year on year.

“This gives confidence that the government’s plan is to keep rising public R&D investment on target over the next ten years to reach parity with our international competitors,” said Sarah Main, director of CASE. “We seem to have turned a corner. Government is matching its long-term ambition with concrete investment.”

The latest money forms part of the government’s Industrial Strategy, a range of policies aimed at boosting the economy across the country. Full details of the strategy will be published on 27 November, but May added in her article that it would include ways to encourage UK leadership in artificial intelligence, big data, clean energy and self-driving cars.

*Nature* [doi:10.1038/nature.2017.23028](https://doi.org/10.1038/nature.2017.23028)