

# News in brief



## UK RESEARCH BUDGET NODS TO HORIZON EUROPE

The United Kingdom has postponed an ambitious science spending target by two years, reveals a plan released on 27 October.

Chancellor of the exchequer Rishi Sunak (pictured), the cabinet's senior finance minister, announced that the government will ramp up research and development spending to £22 billion (US\$30.3 billion) per year by 2026 – and not by 2024 as originally planned. The pledge means that in five years, public science spending would be around £5 billion higher than in 2021, a 35% boost.

For the first time, the budget also earmarks funding for the country's participation in the European Union's flagship research programme, Horizon Europe. The costs of participation were previously covered by the UK subscription to the EU, which ceased after Brexit.

But any deal is contingent on the ultimate status of EU–UK relations. Negotiations have come to a standstill over a row about a customs border between Great Britain and the island of Ireland.

The budget forecasts that foreign-aid spending – which includes funds for researchers in low-income countries – could return to 0.7% of gross national income by 2024–25, after it was cut to 0.5% in the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

## AFRICAN LIGHT SOURCE NEEDS \$1 BILLION

Scientists say they need to raise US\$1 billion for Africa's first synchrotron light source, a particle accelerator that produces intense radiation used to probe the structure and behaviour of matter.

Globally, there are some 70 light-source facilities – synchrotrons and free electron lasers – but none is in Africa. “These light sources are just transforming science, and Africa has to be a player,” says Sekazi Mtingwa, a high-energy physicist from the United States and one of the founders of the African Light Source (AfLS) Foundation, which is based in South Africa. The foundation is one of two organizations behind the light-source push.

One-third of the \$1 billion will be needed for the synchrotron hardware; one-third for buildings; and the remainder for investment in researchers, including training programmes. In addition, around \$100 million a year will be needed in running costs, says AfLS executive committee chair Simon Connell, a high-energy physicist at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa. Funding for the project would have to come from African member states.

An early decision will be which country should host the facility. After that, it will take at least ten years before the synchrotron is open for science.

John Mugabe, who studies science and innovation policy at the University of Pretoria, questions whether the project will be able to raise the required funding, at least in the short to medium term. Africa's governments are struggling to get adequate funding for their existing domestic science projects, he told *Nature*.

## SCIENTISTS' FEARS OF RACIAL BIAS SURGE AMID US CRACKDOWN ON CHINA TIES

The US government's search for spies in laboratories and businesses has stoked fear among scientists of Chinese descent, according to a survey of nearly 2,000 researchers.

The China Initiative, launched under former US president Donald Trump, has led to several well-publicized arrests of scientists since 2018, often over links to collaborators or institutions in China. The US government has said the goal of the effort is to stop the theft of US trade secrets by the Chinese government.

But civil-rights groups and individual researchers have warned that the US government's scrutiny of scientists under this programme has hampered valuable scientific collaborations with researchers in China and stirred concerns of racial profiling.

“We've seen anecdotal evidence about the chilling effects of the China Initiative,” says Ashley Gorski, a senior staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union in New York City. “The study makes clear that the effects are far-reaching.”

The survey, run between May and July 2021, was supported by the Committee of 100, an organization of Chinese American leaders in New York City. Its results were released on 28 October in a white paper (see [go.nature.com/3ecgmrt](https://go.nature.com/3ecgmrt)).

About half of the scientists of Chinese descent who participated reported experiencing “considerable” fear, anxiety or a mixture of both that they are being surveilled by the US government. Only 12% of non-Chinese scientists who responded reported that concern (see ‘Scientists fearful’).

Among participants who said they conducted research involving China within the past 3 years, about 23% of scientists of Chinese descent said they decided to stop collaborations with researchers in China, whereas only 10% of other respondents said the same.

“The differences are undeniable in ways that are quite profound for those of Chinese descent,” says Jenny Lee, a social scientist at the University of Arizona in Tucson and a co-author of the report.

### SCIENTISTS FEARFUL

A survey of scientists has confirmed the fear and anxiety that those of Chinese descent have over the US government's China Initiative. Some 2,000 respondents answered the following prompts, with clear differences between Chinese and non-Chinese scientists.

■ Scientists of Chinese descent ■ Non-Chinese scientists

#### Feel fear and/or anxiety about US government surveillance



#### Feel racially profiled by US government



#### Feel they have had difficulty obtaining US research funding because of their race, nationality or country of origin



#### Feel they have had professional challenges because of their race, nationality or country of origin

