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Political leaders urged to put medical science at the heart of the next Government

In anticipation of the next general election, the Academy of Medical Sciences has written to the leaders of the major political parties to outline its vision for UK medical science. The vision highlights how groundbreaking advances in medical science offer the next UK Government an unprecedented opportunity to reinvigorate the economy, to enhance the productivity of the NHS and to make public services more cost-effective. The Academy calls upon the next Government to put medical research to work as the engine of Britain's future prosperity.

Professor Sir John Bell FRS HonFREng PMedSci, President of the Academy of Medical Sciences, said *'We believe that making medical science a central pillar of government policy will produce a flourishing UK economy and alleviate the burden of ill health on patients and public services.'*

The vision sets out seven important challenges that must be tackled to reap the rewards from recent public sector investment in medical science. These challenges include fulfilling the research potential of the NHS and reviewing the stifling regulatory environment that is driving medical research abroad. Other challenges focus on the need to create incentives to secure and attract medical science industries in the UK and build a world-class biomedical workforce to maintain the UK's current strengths in basic and clinical science.

Sir John added, *'A Government that unites researchers from across academia, the NHS, industry and the charitable sector, and engages with patients and the public, can make significant progress towards addressing the challenges [we identify] within five years.'*

The UK has historically supported vibrant research-intensive medical science industries as part of its knowledge economy, however commercial research activity

is moving abroad where there is less burdensome regulation and more incentives. Decisive action is needed now to attract and anchor increasingly mobile medical researchers and life science industries in the UK.

No other country enjoys the outstanding opportunities for medical research represented by the NHS, which together with our world class universities, research councils, charities and companies, offers an unparalleled competitive advantage. This potential must be fulfilled and the NHS must become a more willing participant in health research to benefit patients.'

Sir John concluded *'Bold leadership is needed to ensure that the UK can continue to generate world-class medical science that is translated into health and wealth benefits. Generous donations to medical research charities and enthusiastic backing of the NHS indicate strong UK public support for medical science. The next UK Government must respond to this chorus of public approval by placing medical science at the heart of its agenda.*

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Sir John Bell is available for telephone interview on Friday 8 January 2010. To arrange an interview or to request a copy of *Reaping the rewards: a vision for UK medical sciences*, please contact:

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Notes for Editors

Academy of Medical Sciences

The independent Academy of Medical Sciences promotes advances in medical science and campaigns to ensure these are translated into benefits for patients. The Academy's Fellows are the United Kingdom's leading medical scientists and scholars from hospitals, academia, industry and the public service.

Reaping the rewards: a vision for UK medical science will be published on Monday 11 January.

The seven challenges identified are:

1. To benefit patients the NHS must become a willing participant in health research.
2. The regulatory environment is driving medical science abroad.
3. Innovative incentives must firmly root the medical science industries in the UK.
4. Publicly funded health research needs further consideration.
5. Public health challenges must become cross-Departmental priorities.

6. Health research should be used as a driver of foreign policy and international development.
7. The UK must grow and sustain its world-class biomedical workforce for our knowledge economy.

Members of the working group who prepared the position paper:

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