

Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
SW1A 2AA

8 October 2026

Dear Prime Minister,

We write as business and university leaders committed to driving growth. Across industries, institutions, nations and regions, we invest in this country's people, ideas and capabilities. We want to work in partnership to see strengths translate into greater investment and good jobs across the UK.

A record settlement for research and development in the last Spending Review sent a key signal to industry. The priority now must be to put that investment to work at scale and speed.

International competition makes this urgent. The United States and China invest at a scale the UK cannot match across every field. Our advantage must come from focus: backing areas where we have genuine depth, frontier research and industrial potential, and moving faster to turn those strengths into commercial success. Capabilities already span the country, from advanced manufacturing in South Yorkshire and compound semiconductors in South Wales to quantum technologies in Scotland.

Devolution can help us capitalise on them. Stronger local leadership can align innovation with skills, infrastructure and finance around the distinctive strengths of places, deepen partnerships between businesses and universities and unlock investment. Done well, it can give places greater agency over their economic future and spread the benefits of innovation-led growth more widely.

Local empowerment and national coordination are not alternatives. Translating our world-leading curiosity research into commercial application and opportunity requires greater connectivity between the national and local. Without coordination, we risk duplicating investment, encouraging places to pursue the same sectors and spreading scarce resources too thinly. Effective devolution must enable places to specialise and collaborate, while retaining the national capacity to connect complementary strengths, assemble critical mass and make investments at the scale needed to compete globally.

There are already foundations to build on. UKRI's Local Innovation Partnerships Fund shows how local priorities can be combined with national expertise, networks and investment. We learn from this approach: empowering local leaders to shape ambitious propositions while connecting them to capabilities and opportunities across the country.

The transformation already under way at UKRI is important: making stronger choices, joining up research and innovation and concentrating resources where they can have greatest impact. Devolution should reinforce that progress, not recreate the fragmentation and thinly spread investment those reforms are designed to overcome.

We need a new partnership that combines stronger local leadership with sustained national investment and the ability to connect capabilities across the country behind opportunities where the UK can win.

We ask you to ensure that the forthcoming fiscal devolution settlement strengthens the contribution of places to the UK's innovation economy while preserving the national capabilities needed to make strategic investments and connect strengths across the country. This means giving local leaders greater power and long-term funding to build on distinctive strengths, alongside sustained national investment and coordination where scale and cross-regional collaboration matter.

Signed by:

Paul Walker, Chair, RELX, and Chair, National Centre for Universities and Business

Sir Jonathan Symonds CBE, Chair, GSK

Sir John Manzoni, Chair, SSE and Diageo

Phil Siveter, Chief Executive Officer, Thales UK

Sarah Walker, Chief Executive UK & Ireland, Cisco

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Dame Clare Barclay DBE, Chair, Industrial Strategy Advisory Council

Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell, Deputy Chair, Industrial Strategy Advisory Council

Dame Anne Glover CBE, CEO and Co-Founder, Amadeus Capital Partners

Professor Simon Harwood, UK Strategy, Technology and Innovation Director (Chief Technology Officer), Leonardo UK

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Professor Chris Day CBE DL, Vice-Chancellor and President, Newcastle University

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Professor Roy Sandbach OBE, Board Member, National Centre for Universities and Business