

A few words from the Director

Unsurprisingly the issue of public sector cuts has dominated the news since the publication of the Cameron government's spending review¹ in October. The review has major implications for many of the areas of concern to SGR.

Let's start with a few positives. UK military spending will see its biggest fall since the end of the Cold War – including cuts in key offensive weapons systems (see p.1). The budget for international development will be increased by one third. Funding for the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) will increase by 13%. Also, the cut in the core science budget is significantly lower than feared.

However, the negatives are far greater and, on closer inspection, even the positives have catches. For example, the main education budget will be cut more deeply than the military budget. The lower than expected cuts in the science budget are conditional on much stronger commercial priorities being accepted for university research, together with a massive hike in tuition fees for students to cover larger cuts in university teaching. The rise in DECC spending is only half the size of the fall in government spending on other environmental issues. Social housing will see huge cuts.

Meanwhile, numerous positive policy options that would help deal with the current economic problems were either missing or given little priority. Let's take a closer look at those related to the military industrial

sector, for example. The option of cutting military spending at least down to the average level of the EU – as part of the adoption of a less aggressive foreign policy – was ignored. The option of cancelling Trident replacement was rejected (although the schedule for replacement has been delayed). A major cut to the Ministry of Defence's R&D budget in order to facilitate full protection of the civilian science budget was rejected (also by some mainstream science organisations). These were among the options put forward by SGR as the spending review was debated (see pp.3-5).

In this context, it is particularly instructive to consider the case of the UK's two new aircraft carriers, the first of which is already under construction. The Cameron government considered cancelling the second, but discovered that to do so would cost more than having it built – due to penalty clauses in the contract signed with the manufacturers, BAE Systems.² This acutely demonstrates the power of the 'military-industrial complex' in forming UK government policy against the national interest. One cannot help thinking that such a contract would never have been agreed with a construction company building schools...

One little-noticed item on the list of government's cuts was the removal of funding for one of its key environmental watchdogs, the Sustainable Development Commission (see p.6). In 2009, the SDC published an influential report, *Prosperity without growth*,³ which pointed to a path away from

an economy dependent on endless growth. It made very strong environmental, social justice and security arguments for pursuing such a policy. If this government truly aims to be the 'greenest ever' – as it claims – it would have made taking forward the recommendations of that report a key priority. The decision to ignore it and end the watchdog's funding speaks volumes.

Nevertheless, as the front-page article argues, the current military cuts coupled with an expanding environmental sector offer an opportunity to shift fundamentally the balance within the UK science, design and engineering professions for the long-term. It's an opportunity we should take with both hands...

Stuart Parkinson

Notes and references

1. A summary of the main budgetary changes can be found at: BBC News online (2010). Spending Review: In graphics. 20 October. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11583746>. The full documents can be downloaded from: http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spend_index.htm
2. The Guardian (2010). BAE warned Cameron over £5bn cost of cancelling aircraft carrier contract. 4 November. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/nov/04/bae-cameron-aircraft-carrier-contract>
3. Jackson T (2009). Prosperity without growth? The transition to a sustainable economy. Sustainable Development Commission. <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/>

New SGR website goes live

Over the summer SGR's website was completely redesigned and updated (see screen shot), making it much easier to navigate, more attractive, and easier for staff to keep updated. The website now contains all SGR's main outputs – reports, briefings, presentations, newsletters, articles, conference reports etc – as well as details of forthcoming events and other general material.

Please take a look at: <http://www.sgr.org.uk/>
The new website was designed and built by GreenNet using Drupal software. SGR's web team is Stuart Parkinson, Kate Maloney, Patricia Hughes and Harry Tsoumpas. We are grateful to the Network for Social Change for providing the funding for the redesign.

