



14 May 2021

Advances or Austerity: What Will Budget 2021 Bring For Science?

“Many New Zealanders credit science and scientists with the successful strategies that saved us from the worst of the pandemic.” said NZAS President Prof Troy Baisden. “Yet most if not all the nation’s scientists got the message this week that their institutions fall into the broad areas of the public service expecting a pay ‘freeze’. Now is the time to read the signal: will we invest in advances and build back better?”

“Other nations, notably the [United States](#), appear poised to invest massively in science and technology to stimulate their economies. They’re building off wide public support for the biotech that built vaccines.”

“If Aotearoa wants advances and excellent use of science like we’ve seen during COVID, we have to invest like other nations. Instead, our scientists are coping with 30 years of austerity. Scientists are wondering if the current Government’s pledge to double R&D investment is real.”

“If the budget signals no new path for New Zealand’s science funding, this means that smart Kiwis going into science face many difficult years of low pay. Top PhD scholarships were once close to a living wage, but [have now crossed under the minimum wage](#) and even under training wages for apprentices. They risk no pay if their work stretches into a fourth year, and then years of gruelling applications for grants and fellowships while juggling short contracts.”

“Next Thursday, the Government’s Budget will let our scientists know if they get their wish for a society that supports them, and the advances they create across issues ranging from health, to climate change, agriculture, and technology. Government investment spills over into society and the private sector in nations with higher well being.

“Australia’s Budget delivered [austerity](#) for their scientists this week. If our Budget copies our neighbour’s, we failed to understand that New Zealand science’s emergency response to COVID was a special case. Do we need a renewed and reformed science system that looks and feels like the COVID response? What would this look like?”

The New Zealand Association of Scientists has developed [a vision for rebuilding the science system Aotearoa deserves](#). Here are two starting points that deserve highlighting as we look ahead to the Budget and beyond:

- Value stable science careers that can take a steady path to big advances, with a strong focus on repairing support for young Kiwi researchers.
- Repackage high overheads into renewed stable funding for trustworthy institutions acting as strategic stewards of science and research, within international norms.

“Scientists are asking whether the budget will bring advances or austerity? Will they finally see the end to 30 years underneath a sinking lid of austerity that has weighed on them and left our international competitiveness on the back foot? What’s needed to build back better? How can we all work together to build the science system New Zealand deserves?”

Contact: Professor Troy Baisden (President NZAS) ph: +64 21 875 160 email: president@scientists.org.nz
www.scientists.org.nz