

New initiative to invest £20M in UK bioenergy

An extra £20M which will more than double the budget for research into green bioenergy was announced at the start of National Science and Engineering Week by Alistair Darling, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) today.

The initiative by BBSRC which will take total public funding to £36M over the next five years was launched at Imperial College in London. It will support the build up of research capacity into how bioenergy can help replace fossil fuels with renewable, low-carbon alternatives.

The UK already has some of the leading experts in photosynthesis - the exploitation of energy from plants and microbes from sunlight. The funding will look at expanding the capacity and skills base allied to turning laboratory excellence into products and processes. Universities and eligible institutions are being asked to come up with proposals for new research centres, collaborative research programmes or new research networks.

Launching the initiative at Imperial College in London, Alistair Darling said:

"We want to leave no stone unturned in reducing our reliance on fossil fuels.

"By significantly increasing the budget for bioenergy research we are giving our excellent science base the opportunity to develop this emerging technology further. Helping it make the leap from the lab to the processes and products of tomorrow.

"There can be no greater prize for science than to contribute to tackling climate change - we want British scientists, British business to lead in that, which is why we are supporting this initiative."

Professor Julia Goodfellow, BBSRC Chief Executive, said: "Bioenergy has a key role to play in the replacement of fossil fuels with renewable, low-carbon alternatives. Photosynthesis is a highly efficient process. 99.5% of the energy that reaches the light harvesting structures of a plant is turned into energy but at the moment we have a poor understanding of what happens once a plant captures this energy. The UK has a world-leading plant science community and is well-placed to develop this science to promote and deliver economic and environmental benefits."

"To fully grasp the environmental and economic opportunities presented by bioenergy the UK needs to meet some important challenges. Our new initiative will help to do this. We need to increase the number of top scientists with bioenergy expertise, we need to bring the UK bioenergy community together into a coherent network, we need to develop a flagship bioenergy programme and we need to ensure that researchers and industry are closely engaged to ensure outcomes have real applications."

Alongside the initiative BBSRC will also look at ways to speed the development of bio-refineries. BBSRC will explore mechanisms for potential academic-industrial collaboration in key areas to ensure strategic research is pursued to underpin industrial processes for the production of non-petrochemical polymers, materials and chemicals.

http://www.biofuels-news.com/news/uk_newinitiative.html