

*Good Homes Alliance*  
*London, 18 December 2024*

**The case for a Public Sector  
Research Establishment for  
the Built Environment**

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[www.edgedebate.com](http://www.edgedebate.com)

*“Successful engineering does not arise from incremental accumulation of successful experience, but rather in reaction to the failures of the past”*

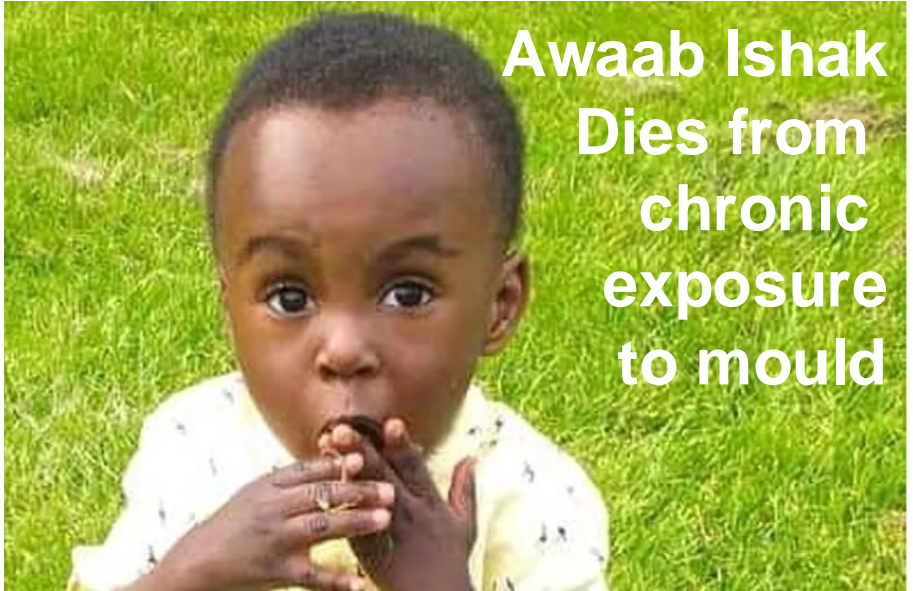
H PETROSKI (1992)

# We've not been good at learning from failures: *so problems can fester until they become catastrophic*

QUOTATION FROM: Carmarthenshire News Online (28 January 2023):

*“the house used to be perfect before [the retrofit] ...*

*“It’s always freezing in here now and you can’t do anything to decorate as it’s ruined within a matter of weeks.”*



**Awaab Ishak Dies from chronic exposure to mould**

**Poor built environment performance is costing us billions**



If we are to thrive in the modern world,  
*The UK urgently needs better-performing  
buildings, towns and open spaces*

GOVERNMENT, INDUSTRY AND SOCIETY NEED SUPPORT, BUT:

- while the built environment accounts for over 20% of national GDP.
- it gets 0.8% of public university research funding - *ten times too little?*

Long term, big picture, research is needed on vital national issues,  
*e.g. resources, land use, infrastructure, housing, settlements, climate.*  
This work will often cross many disciplinary boundaries and scales.

We also need specific services targeted at government, industry  
and society, *that also maintain and update institutional memory.*

Other G7 countries have bodies that fulfil this role.

*The UK has a few, but in other areas, e.g. NICE, NPL and the HSE.*

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# Where can government get its intelligence?

*Could an independent, authoritative, public sector research establishment help?*

## **Public Sector Research Establishments (PSREs)**

*are a diverse collection of public bodies carrying out research.*

*Their research supports a wide range of government objectives, including informing policy making, statutory and regulatory functions and providing a national strategic resource in key areas of scientific research.*

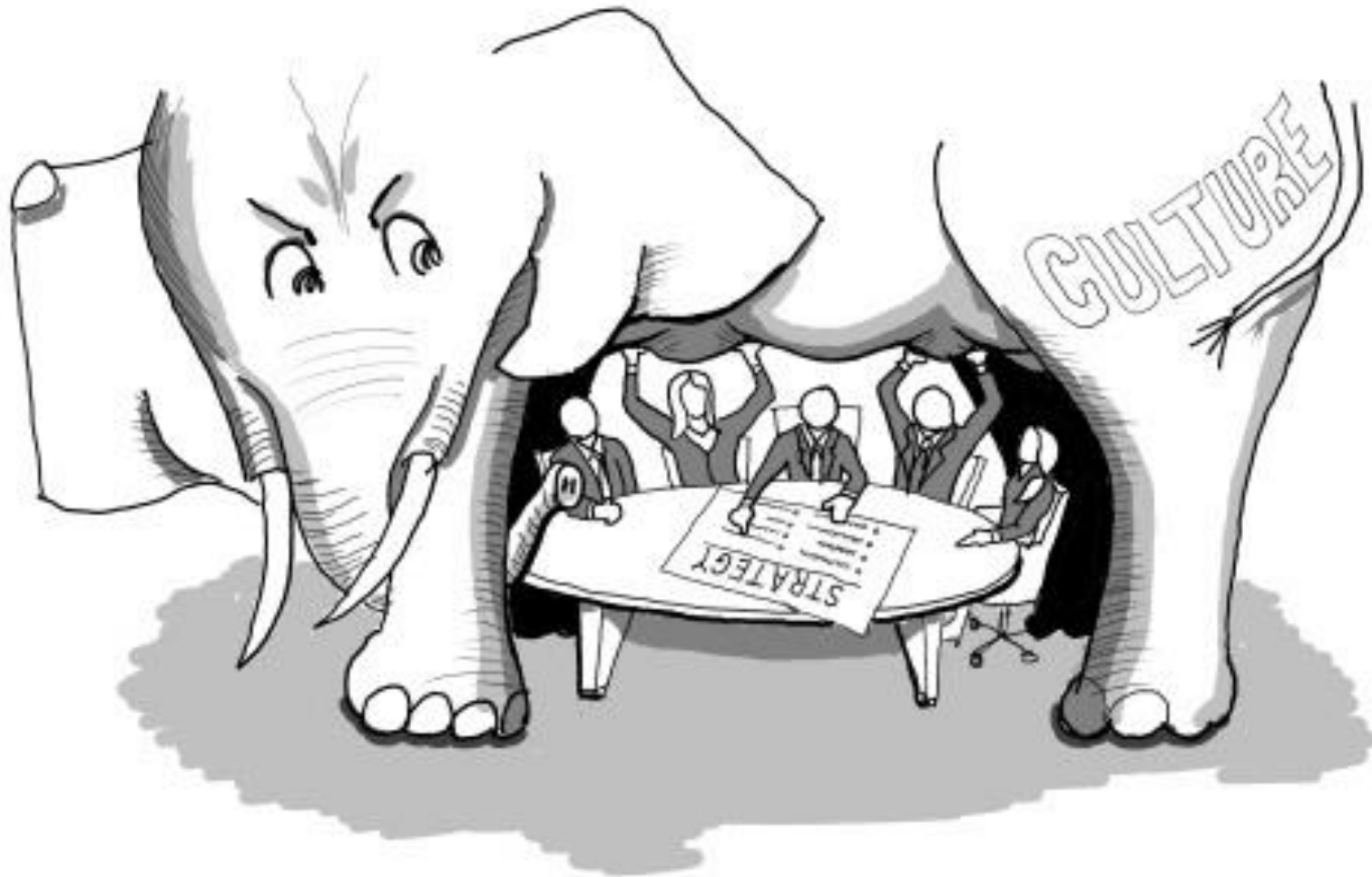
*They can also provide emergency response services ... and interact with businesses around a wide array of innovation-related functions.*

CABINET OFFICE (2019)

*The UK [has] an unusually low number compared to other countries with a similar level of research intensity.*

ROYAL SOCIETY (2020)

*“Altogether, we are failing to deliver. And I think the whole political system is responsible” – LORD DEBEN*



SOURCE: <https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/altogether-failing-deliver-chair-climate-committee-lord-deben-warns-dangers-climate-inaction#:~:text=“Altogether%20we%20are%20failing%20to,is%20responsible%2C”%20he%20says.>

CARTOON: Bruce Flye, 2012, [www.bruceflye.com/concept-graphics/illustrations/4092610](http://www.bruceflye.com/concept-graphics/illustrations/4092610)

# Next Steps

***The Edge seeks a public discussion*** about the UK increasing its annual investment in built environment research, and the form of an independent, properly-funded National body with PSRE status that will:

- *bring together existing and new areas of research*
- *provide much-needed continuity of expertise*
- *identify, coordinate and curate research needs and provide advice.*

Well coordinated research and knowledge transfer gives a cost-effective opportunity to improve the quality and resilience of the built environment.

It also reduces risk to the supply side, government and owners by:

- early identification and avoidance of potential problems;
- considered implementation of new techniques and technologies
- improving social and economic performance of the built environment.

Key areas include health, safety, wellbeing, climate and biodiversity.

## **SOME QUESTIONS:**

1. *What organisational form? Can existing organisations be adapted?*
  2. *How can we gain political consensus to ensure long-term continuity?*
  3. *What funding options will be able to maintain its long term viability?*
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An aerial photograph of a city, likely Pittsburgh, showing a dense urban landscape with a river (the Allegheny River) winding through it. The city features a mix of older brick buildings and modern high-rise structures. A large red text box is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# Building Competence and Capability

The case for a Public Sector  
Research Establishment for  
the built environment

**DOWNLOAD HERE:**

[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cc0112bb91449446cbd2a16/t/666c0df64908df1a06941a96/1718357496996/NBERO-0624\\_v10lr.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cc0112bb91449446cbd2a16/t/666c0df64908df1a06941a96/1718357496996/NBERO-0624_v10lr.pdf)