

CaSE Evidence to Lords Inquiry into Departmental Scientific Advisers

This following evidence was submitted by CaSE to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee Inquiry into the Role and Function of Departmental Chief Scientific Advisers (CSAs), on 11th October 2011. We've also compiled a Scorecard to rate the suitability of each departmental CSA, which you can view [here](#).

The Committee's report was published in February 2012.

Introduction

- 1. The Campaign for Science and Engineering is a non-profit organisation which advocates for the UK to become a better place in which to conduct science and engineering. We are supported by a hundred different organisational members in the science and engineering sector, ranging from universities and companies to learned societies and research charities.
- 2. Science and engineering impacts on the work of every government department, from climate change to transport infrastructure and military defence to school-age education. We believe that independent scientific advice should be at the heart of government and that each department should have a Chief Scientific Advisers (CSAs) to deliver expert advice and oversee science policymaking.
- 3. Based on the responses to a series of parliamentary questions asked by Lord Willis of Knaresborough in June 2011, data provided by the Government Office for Science (GO Science), and our own research, CaSE has put together a scorecard to rate the suitability of each departmental CSA. Note that the scores relate to the departmental structure for the CSA, rather than the suitability of the individuals who fill those roles. The scorecard underpins CaSE's response to this inquiry and can be found [here](#).

Appointing departmental CSAs

- 4. Further to calls made by CaSE and others, CSAs have been appointed in nearly all government departments to ensure that robust, joined-up evidence is at the core of decision-making. Most recently we welcomed the appointment of Dr James Richardson as the first Chief Scientific Adviser at HM Treasury. CaSE has long argued for someone to be appointed within the department who can act as a champion for evidence-based policy in that department, and to be a link with the network of Chief Scientific Advisers within Government. We look forward to meeting with him shortly.
- 5. However, this momentum across government risks being undermined as a number of CSA positions have been vacated and no successor appointed. Currently, four government departments have vacant CSA positions. The role of CSA at the Department for Transport (DfT)[1] and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)[2] has been vacant since May 2011 and are only now being advertised, with the process due to conclude at the end of

September. The previous departmental CSA, Professor Brian Collins, held the position jointly between the two departments and there is some confusion over whether the positions advertised are in a joint or separate capacity.

- 6. The position of CSA at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is vacant, with the department currently “considering options to fill this role”. [3] The tenure of Professor Sir Mark Welland as departmental CSA at the Ministry of Defence (MOD) came to an end in August 2011 and the department is planning to reduce the grading of its CSA position [4]. We are concerned that, due to increased financial and staffing restrictions placed upon them, government departments may be less-inclined to fill CSA vacancies, or downgrade their importance.

Action: **Chief Scientific Advisers to be appointed in all government departments.**

Regular Meetings with Ministers and Policy Makers

- 7. Nine government departments failed to publish the precise number of times their departmental CSA met with the Secretary of State or the Minister to whom they have direct responsibility, between June 2010-2011. [5] It is crucially important that Secretaries of State and relevant Ministers have regular meetings with their departmental CSA. Without adequate interactions with their CSA, Secretaries of State and Ministers that do not see science and engineering as central to their mission may develop policies without considering their importance. For greater transparency and accountability, records of these meetings should be made public.

Action: **Secretaries of State and relevant Ministers must hold regular meetings with their departmental Chief Scientific Adviser and should publish relevant records.**

Independent Expertise

- 8. Departmental CSAs should be independently appointed from outside Whitehall, ideally with a concurrent placement in the science and engineering community. Four of the currently-appointed CSAs are not independent professionals from outside government, but rather civil servants appointed from within the department. [6]

Action: **All departmental Chief Scientific Advisors to be appointed from outside of government**

Action: **All departmental Chief Scientific Advisors to have expertise relevant to the department's mission.**

Sufficient Oversight Powers

- 9. In order to fulfil their duties and scrutinise policy thoroughly, CSAs need to have sufficient oversight powers. Only three departments have a place on their management board for the CSA [7], despite recommendations by GO Science that a senior analyst should sit on the executive board of each government department to ensure that decisions on strategy and

resources are fully evidence-based[8]. Similarly, only five CSAs have direct control over their department's science, research, or evidence budget[9], despite GO Science recommendations that CSAs should be consulted by departmental strategy and finance teams on strategic and budget proposals.[10]

Action: All departmental Chief Scientific Advisors to have a seat at their departmental board and to have oversight over the department's R&D budget.

Science Advisory Councils

- 10. Science Advisory Councils (SAC) support the work of CSAs and provide expert, independent and published advice on science policy and strategy at a departmental level. However the majority of departments have yet to establish these councils – currently only four departments have a purpose-led Science Advisory Council in place.[11]

Action: Every government department to create a Science Advisory Council to support the work of the departmental Scientific Advisors

Engineering & Technology Advice

- 11. In those departments where engineering advice is particularly important, the appointment of a departmental Chief Engineering Adviser (DCEA) should be considered. Each should have direct access to the Secretary of State and relevant ministers. Like DCSAs, a DCEA should have direct access to the Secretary of State and relevant ministers.

Action: Government departments that would benefit from having a departmental Chief Engineering Adviser should appoint one.

For further details contact Nick Hall, Researcher and Administrator at the Campaign for Science and Engineering, on 020 7679 4994.

[1] Recruitment consultancy firm 'Odgers Berndtson' website, <http://bit.ly/n3jmn0>

[2] Recruitment consultancy firm 'Odgers Berndtson' website, <http://bit.ly/rrHcuE>

[3] Parliamentary written question, Lord Willis of Knaresborough, 22 June 2011, <http://services.parliament.uk/hansard/Lords/ByDate/20110622/writtenanswers/part012.html>.

[4] House of Lords debate, 'Research: Science and Technology Committee Report', 8 June 2011. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/110608-0002.htm>

[5] CaSE Departmental CSA Scorecard (Appendix).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] GO Science report, 'Science and Engineering in Government' (2008).

[9] CaSE Departmental CSA Scorecard (Appendix).

[10] GO Science report, 'Science and Engineering in Government' (2008).

[11] CaSE Departmental CSA Scorecard (Appendix).