



4 July 2007

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### Science & Technology Select Committee

Following the Prime Minister's reorganisation of Government ministries, arrangements for scrutiny of Government by Select Committees will inevitably need to be addressed, and as Leader of the House, you will obviously take a leading role in the process.

The scientific, engineering and business communities strongly urge you to ensure that the House of Commons continues to have a Science & Technology Select Committee.

The anomalous position of the existing Science & Technology Committee (without a ministry to Shadow) has arisen for good reasons to do with the unique cross-departmental importance of science. For example, the grand challenges like climate change and national security have enormous scientific and technological facets, while some of the most serious problems for the UK's schools are in the field of science. In fact, just about every ministry has major scientific interests.

We support the focus on innovation inherent in the new departmental arrangements, and recognise that they follow from Gordon Brown's long-standing appreciation of just how crucial research, science and engineering will be to the future of the nation's economic, social and environmental well-being. We hope the new Department of Innovation, Universities & Skills will raise awareness of the importance of science across other departments of state.

However, it would be a mistake to limit the scope of Parliamentary scrutiny of science policy to the narrow remit of the DIUS. To do so could severely damage the potential role that backbenchers play in science policy. It would be a shame if changes designed to promote the importance of science accidentally had the effect of diminishing its role in Parliament.

For the past decade or more, under Chairs from all three major parties, the Science & Technology Committee has helped to ensure that the UK's great scientific strengths are

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properly deployed for the benefit of the British people. Its reports on subjects such as the classification of drugs, meeting the nation's energy needs and human reproductive technologies have cut across the boundaries of individual Government departments, and have been genuinely important in promoting informed debate and developing robust policies.

The new Prime Minister set out clear agenda yesterday for empowering Parliament in key areas. This demonstrates the extent to which the new Government welcomes Parliamentary participation and scrutiny. Retaining a Science & Technology Committee in the House of Commons can only be a positive step, and we urge you, together with your Government and Parliamentary colleagues, to continue the arrangements that have worked so well over the past decade.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Peter Cotgreave  
Director