

Scrutinize science or risk our competitive advantage



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Science matters – especially in Parliament. Whether it’s tackling climate change, debating stem cells or responding to flu pandemics, Parliament requires sound scientific input and effective scrutiny of policy.

With science now the responsibility of Lord Mandelson’s mega-department of Business, Innovation and Skills – with six ministers in the unelected House of Lords – it is essential that the Commons has a dedicated science committee to hold government to account.

A single unwieldy ‘BIS’ select committee would fail to do science justice. It would have to deal with everything from business regulation to university fees and the Post Office as well as the future of Research Council funding or the Large Hadron Collider. As a member of the former Science and Technology Committee I know that this approach simply wouldn’t work. So I’m not surprised that the outgoing IUSS committee has called for the re-instigation of a dedicated replacement.

As science, research and innovation may well hold the key to pulling our nation out of recession, *the return of a reinvigorated science committee is essential.*

It would be a sorry day for Britain if a vital area of national importance, which just two years ago had its own select committee, were reduced to a bit-part in a single ‘super committee’ that had other fish to fry. With a large science budget and the challenges facing the research base in a downturn, we must *scrutinize science policy or risk our competitive advantage.*

No doubt a new science committee would cause a few headaches for the science minister, present or future. But that’s exactly what it should be doing!