



## Conservative Science Policy

### Introduction

A Conservative Government would need to make clear and consistent statements about their policies for science and engineering early on as there has not been much discussion of it (so far) in the run-up to the election. It is critical that the Science Minister and senior Ministers engage the science community and set out their policies through:

- A speech by either David Cameron or George Osborne specifically about science and engineering.
- Setting out a clear process, including building the evidence-base, to develop a comprehensive national science and engineering strategy.

### Educating the next generation in science, engineering and mathematics

Science and mathematics education is a clear policy area where the Science Minister will need to work with other ministerial colleagues. CaSE has had discussions with the Conservative team for Children, Schools and Families and these are the key policy commitments that we want to see.

- All schools offering three separate sciences at GCSE taught by specialist science teachers.
- See through the introduction of the new pair of GCSEs in mathematics.
- Maintain support for practical work in school, including the provision of technicians.

At higher education there needs to be sustainable funding for expensive science, technology, and engineering courses. This would mean changing the funding ratio to 2 to 1 rather than current 1.7 between lab and library-based subjects.

As science and engineering are international endeavours it is very important that any changes to the visa system do not hamper the UK's ability to engage international scientists and engineers in the UK.

### Priorities for the next Science Budget

A Conservative government could instil confidence in its commitment to the Science Budget by:

- Ensuring that any snap Budget for 2010/2011 does not affect the Science Budget allocation.
- Setting a Science Budget for 2011/12 – 2013/2014 that is in line with the Science and Innovation Investment Framework (2004-2014). This would require setting a Science Budget that at least matches the projected economic growth for that period.
- Ring-fencing the Science Budget from other spending commitments within the Department that provides its oversight.

### Government portfolio of support for R&D investment

- Give greater consideration to the portfolio of public investment in R&D, which exists to deliver different policy objectives.
- A Conservative government should not focus its effort early on in radically changing the system for funding the Research Base. There is no need to radically alter the dual support system. If any changes were to be proposed than they should be thoroughly examined prior to being implemented.
- Strengthen the Technology Strategy Board to foster industry and university collaboration in developing emerging technologies.

- Protect government department R&D budgets to enable research that can evaluate the efficacy of current and planned policies. Departmental R&D spending plans should be published in advance.
- Ensure that the tax system (R&D Tax Credit) encourages industry investment in R&D in the UK.
- Commit to the Charity Research Support Fund.
- Support UK engagement in European and other international research collaborations.
- Appoint a Chief Scientific Adviser to the Treasury to examine the probable consequences of different investment strategies.

### **Scientific Advice**

- A Conservative Government could show the importance of putting science and engineering advice at the heart of government by moving the Government Office of Science and the Council for Science and Technology to the Cabinet Office.
- Not all departmental chief scientific advisers have been appointed from outside government. This could be rectified by having open competitions for those positions.
- Ensure that the Ministerial Code is updated to incorporate the Principles of how ministers should treat scientific advice and advisers.

### **Parliamentary Scrutiny**

- Support scrutiny of science and engineering policy through a Commons Science and Technology Committee.

### **Key steps for an incoming Science Minister**

- Secure a place on the Cabinet and the Chair of a Cabinet sub-Committee on Science and Innovation. This is important as science policy cuts across government and therefore needs Cabinet co-ordination.
- Show that the Government understands the importance of science, engineering and mathematics to the nation and is committed to developing the best policies during a difficult period.
- Develop the evidence base to inform science policy decisions, particularly with respect to the evaluation of policies to increase impact of research.
- Ensure that there is consultation, clarity and transparency when setting high-level guidance on science and engineering research funding priorities.

### **CaSE Letter to the Leaders**

CaSE will be writing to David Cameron and the other party leaders in March to ask them to respond to the following challenges prior to election day:

- Educate the next generation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics
- Develop the UK's strength in science and engineering research and development
- Enable science and engineering to create economic opportunities and respond to societal challenges
- Organise and utilise science and engineering within government

### **CaSE Working Papers**

This briefing has been developed from our three working papers covering *Research Funding*, *Education and Skills*, and *Science in Government*. CaSE has been working with leading universities, industries, research charities and learned societies to develop our ideas in these areas. I hope that these briefings and the meetings you are having within the Party and with external stakeholder are helping to develop your thoughts on what a Conservative science policy would be.

### **Further information**

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