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CaSE PR 07/05

Government numbers don't add up - we need more mathematics (and physics and chemistry) teachers

CaSE today called for the Government to recognise the critical state of secondary science education and to take definitive action to improve the situation.

Publishing a new report on science in schools, CaSE's Assistant Director, Dr Hilary Leever, said: "We are in a downward spiral in which fewer students choose physics, chemistry, and mathematics A-levels, which in turn means there are fewer graduates who can teach these subjects.

"Although the Government has taken some steps, it has failed to appreciate just how critical the situation has become. We were alarmed when Tony Blair recently expressed optimism that 7,500 new science teachers had been hired in a single year. In fact, 7,500 people had started teacher training courses in all subjects counted as STEM (including business studies and textiles). People signing up to start a textiles teaching course were being hailed as new classroom science teachers.

"In 2006, there were just 350 teacher training recruits who were physics specialists. A lot are expected to drop-out before they reach the classroom and two-fifths typically leave within the first five years. Out of the original 350, that will leave fewer than 200 new physics teachers.

"Frankly, we're tired of complaining that 25% of schools do not have any physics teacher, and there are worrying shortages in chemistry and mathematics too. A million children are being taught physics by people who are not physics teachers. It's not fair on the children, it's not fair on the teachers and it's bad for the economy."

CaSE has welcomed the increase in 'golden hello' payments and bursaries for teachers in shortage subjects, but argues that bigger steps need to be taken.

"Teacher training courses should have targets for physics and chemistry instead of a general science target. And we need to make sure that new teachers stay in the classroom. Currently, many teachers cannot take advantage of training because there is no funding for teaching cover. Ministers are happy to talk about all the fantastic schools science clubs and centres and other initiatives that have been set up. Many of these are great, but they are not going to affect the many children in those state schools that are not taking part."

The *Opinion Forum*, which is based on discussions with a wide range of scientific and business groups, argues that having specialist teachers will have the greatest impact on student numbers. Hilary Leever said:

"Gordon Brown has said he wants Britain to be the best educated country in the world. We hope that he is going to demonstrate this by securing the future scientific workforce of the UK early in his new administration."

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The Opinion Forum report is available at:

www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/documents/2007/CaSE0710.pdf

Additional background material is available at:

www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/documents/2007/CaSE0713.pdf

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