



CaSE response to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's invitation to help scope its inquiry into:

Defra's Science Capabilities

1. The Campaign for Science & Engineering (CaSE) is a pressure group aiming to improve the scientific and engineering health of the UK. Our objective is to communicate to Parliament and the nation as a whole the economic and cultural importance of science and engineering, and the vital need for its funding by government and industry. CaSE is supported by its members, which includes individuals, corporations, universities, research charities and learned and professional societies.
2. One of CaSE's five tests for the Government's science and engineering policies is the "proper funding of science in government ministries, and no political interference in handling scientific advice on contentious issues." CaSE welcomes parliamentary scrutiny of departmental science capabilities.

R&D Budget

3. Departmental R&D budgets are a good headline indicator of its science capability. The Sainsbury Review recommended that all government departments should invest and protect their R&D budgets (rec 8.4). The Committee should investigate Defra's R&D budget and if it has ring-fenced it. The Committee may also wish to investigate Defra's progress on implementing its evidence and innovation strategy. Defra agencies, such as the Central Science Laboratory and CEFAS, are critical to its science capabilities and should be included within the scope of the inquiry.

Independent Scientific Advice

4. The Committee may wish to investigate how well Defra's scientific advisory system is operating. Defra has been a leader in this area and now has a well established Chief Scientific Adviser position, a Scientific Advisory Council, and various specialist advisory committees. However, there has been concern over how Defra has dealt with scientific advice on controversial issues, such as badgers and bovine TB.

Support for Scientists and Engineers

5. The Committee may wish to investigate Defra's support for scientists and engineers within Defra and its links with the wider science and engineering community. This could include investigating Defra's support for secondments to bring external scientists and engineers into departments and get to civil servants into research organisations.

NDPBs

6. It is critical that the inquiry investigates the science capabilities of Defra's NDPBs (e.g. Natural England, Environment Agency). Defra's NDPBs should have sufficient R&D budgets, specialists and appropriate scientific advisory systems.

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