

CaSE Letters from the Leaders – Election 2015

7th April 2015

Below is the response from the leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron.

Dear CaSE,

Thank you for your recent correspondence, regarding science and engineering and the Conservative Party's 2015 Manifesto. It is good of you to have taken the time and trouble to get in touch.

As you are aware, my Policy Unit is carefully considering all policy areas in advance of our 2015 manifesto. We will be setting out our policy plans for the next Parliament in due course, however I can assure you that making sure we have a world-class science and engineering industry is part of the Conservative's long-term economic plan to deliver sustainable growth, create more jobs and help secure a better future for hardworking people and their families. We are proud that the UK is a world-leader in science and engineering and by investing in infrastructure and research, encouraging innovation and nurturing engineering talent, the Conservative Party will ensure the UK's science and engineering industry remains one of the world's best.

In government, we have set aside £4.6 billion each year to 2015/16 for home-grown science and engineering infrastructure and research. And we have committed £5.9 billion of capital to support scientific distinction up to 2021 — the longest investment pledge to science capital in decades. We want the UK to continue to play a leading role in developing new technologies, and we want the industry to continue to employ thousands of our talented school and university graduates. We have funded projects that boast outstanding expertise in science and engineering to help them achieve even more. For example, we have committed £800 million to major new research facilities including £235 million in the advanced materials Sir Henry Royce Institute, £113 million in big data at Hartree, Daresbury, £95 million to take the lead in the next European mission to Mars, £31 million in new energy security and innovation centres, £60 million to extend the capabilities of the National Nuclear Users Facility and £20 million for an innovation centre on ageing. A majority Conservative government would continue to invest in science and engineering, centred on the Science and Innovation Strategy published last year.

Innovation is the lifeblood of the sector and we have taken action to nurture great ideas. Thanks to £1.4 billion of public and private investment over the last five years, we have developed a network of seven Catapult centres, where scientists and engineers work side by side on research and development, turning ideas into new products and services to generate growth. Additionally, we are improving the competitiveness of research and development tax credit schemes and we have introduced the patent box to make it easier to protect and profit from new inventions. For companies that need an investment boost to get their ideas up and running, we have given over £150 million to the UK Innovation Investment Fund — a venture capital fund that supports technology-based businesses, including in the digital technologies, clean technology and advanced manufacturing sectors.

But, as you know, there is little use in all this investment if we do not have the right people with the right problem-solving skills to do the job. That is why we are reforming the education system — so that the UK produces the next generation of scientists and engineers. In 2014, we launched the 'Your Life'

campaign to help boost participation in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) in schools nationwide. Our goal was to raise the number of A-level maths and physics students by 50 per cent in three years and to double the number of undergraduate degrees taken by women in engineering and technology by 2030. The results so far are encouraging: more than 75,000 young people started apprenticeships in STEM subjects in 201-3/14 — that is an increase of over 40 per cent in just four years.

On top of this, by working closely with industry, we have provided an extra £400 million for university science departments to develop world-class facilities so the UK can meet the science industry's demand for highly skilled young people. We have linked that funding directly to commitments on equality of opportunity, to ensure that the talent is drawn from the broadest possible pool and that background is not an obstacle to success in this highly competitive environment. We are also giving financial support to part-time engineering students who have previously studied for a degree, and we are introducing loans of up to £10,000 for young people who want to undertake postgraduate study.

You can be assured that a Conservative government will be committed to investing in science and engineering because we want to see our strong and worldwide reputation in this hugely important area continue to go from strength to strength.

Thank you, once again, for your correspondence. I hope you find this response helpful and I look forward to continuing to work with CaSE as we strive to achieve our shared goals for this key sector.

Below is the response from the leader of the Labour Party, Ed Miliband

Dear CaSE,

It's great to have opportunity to set out how a Labour Government would support world-class science and engineering in driving growth, prosperity and business success for the 21st century.

The UK's strong science and engineering base is one of our greatest assets as a nation, with an unparalleled record of invention and innovation driven by world-leading firms and universities.

But our economy is only now picking up after the slowest recovery from a recession in a century and too often working families are not feeling the benefit. Average wages have fallen by £1,600 a year since 2010, and the lower tax receipts as a result of this squeeze on family budgets have also led to a failure to deal with the deficit.

These failures on growth, living standards and the deficit are symptoms of a wider failure to address the unbalanced patterns of an old economy which is too reliant on consumption and rising house prices, while levels of exports, wages and skills are too low to create the long term success Britain needs.

We have a plan for working families and business to succeed together. It will raise living standards, create more high skill, high wage jobs, support our leading firms and sectors in planning for the future, and ensure the UK can make the most of new technological advances.

Science and engineering have a central role to play in this plan, as well as managing the wider global challenges of the 21st century from tackling climate change and making the transition to a low carbon economy, to delivering a world-class NHS that supports the needs of an ageing society.

Yet, at the moment, persistently lower levels of investment and productivity relative to other advanced economies are exacerbated by:

- A lack of long-term planning for major public investments in research and infrastructure;
- Serious skills shortages in STEM subjects, including a looming shortfall of more than 400,000 engineers in the next decade, that are threatening our ability to grow our leading sectors and meet the challenges of the future;
- The current uncertainty of Britain's future position in the European Union because of the Conservatives' commitment to a referendum on our continued membership within two years of the General Election.

That's why Labour's Better Plan for Britain's Prosperity, which I launched in February 2015, includes measures to implement a long term funding framework for science and innovation, ensure our research base and companies can get the skills they need to succeed, build a long term investment culture in business and secure our place in a reformed European Union. Some of the main elements of our approach are set out below.

Labour understands that Britain will only succeed when working people succeed. In the modern global economy, supporting a broader contribution from firms and working people across all regions and sectors of the economy is the only route to sustainable growth, rising living standards, and bringing down the deficit.

Yours sincerely,

Ed Miliband

Labour's plan for science and engineering

Providing long term policy certainty and expertise:

Labour will introduce a long-term funding framework to provide the stability and long-termism that our research base and companies need. Sustained government support for the scientific and technological advances that are often too high risk for firms to carry out alone can encourage higher levels of business investment.

Our approach will build on the previous Labour Government's ten year funding framework for science, and will cover spending on innovation and applied research as well as traditional science spending. The strategy will signal our priorities for science and innovation – supporting Britain to take advantage of new technological developments in a digital age and tackle the major 21st century challenges such as climate change and an ageing society. We will also look at how to make smarter use of departmental data and spending to inform policy-making and ensure investments in R&D in areas such as energy, transport and health are being used strategically to support growth and innovation in our leading sectors. Key to this will be efforts to strengthen scientific advice at all levels of government – including looking at whether the network of Chief Scientific Advisors could be broadened and the benefits of a more multidisciplinary approach.

Educating the scientists and engineers of the future:

Labour will set a new national mission to put the UK back at the forefront of invention, technology and engineering. As a country we need to work together to meet the engineering skills gap – and in the 21st century that means not just the traditional civil, mechanical and electrical engineers, but also the engineering sectors of the future in which the UK could also excel, including information technology, green energy, and life sciences. And for this to succeed we will need to support more young women to do STEM subjects and go into careers in science and engineering.

To do that Labour will implement a radical set of reforms to create a clear gold standard vocational route from schools right through to university, including measures to:

- Introduce a new gold standard Technical Baccalaureate for 16-18 year olds, with vocational qualifications accredited by employers;
- Ensure that all young people study English and maths to 18;
- Reform FE colleges into specialist Institutes of Technical Education, with measures to improve the teaching in colleges and their links to employers;
- Boost the number of high quality apprenticeships by requiring all firms that get a large government contract to offer apprenticeships and giving employers more control over apprenticeship funding and standards, in exchange for driving up the number of high quality apprenticeships in their sectors and supply chains; and
- Introduce new Technical Degrees, delivered in partnership with industry, to ensure firms can get the specialist skills they need to succeed and support our world-class university system to take a leading role in driving growth in their regions.

Building a long term investment culture:

Labour will support businesses to raise levels of investment in training and R&D by providing certainty, improving access to finance, and tackling the short-term pressures facing some of our leading firms. In an independent review for the Labour Party, Sir George Cox identified incentives in the public and private sector that create short-term pressures that are limiting levels of investment.

We will foster innovation and investment in new low carbon technologies by strengthening the Green Investment Bank and setting a 2030 decarbonisation target, and create certainty for wider investment by setting up an independent infrastructure commission to plan for Britain's long term needs. We will ensure small and medium sized firms can access the finance they need to innovate and grow by implementing a British Investment Bank and a network of regional banks. And we will protect our leading firms from short-term pressures by putting duties on investors to prioritise the long-term growth of companies, restricting who is able to vote on a takeover to those already holding shares when a bid is made, and looking to broaden the public interest test for takeovers to take into account the impact on the UK's science base.

Securing the UK's place in a reformed European Union:

Labour will secure Britain's place in a reformed European Union. As well as enabling UK exporters to access to international product markets, the EU enhances our world-leading research capabilities by supporting collaborations with other countries and providing more than £1bn in research funding a year.

At a time when we need to prioritise growth and jobs it is not right to threaten the interests of Britain's leading firms and research base with an in/out referendum on Europe at an arbitrary date. By putting

the UK at the heart of the EU we can reform it to make sure that jobs, growth and rising living standards are at the heart of its agenda. Labour will push to change the way that the EU budget is spent – focusing on areas such as infrastructure, energy and innovation – and leading reform of state aid rules so that future governments have powers to pursue more active industrial strategies that support national growth and prosperity.

Below is the response from the leader of the Liberal Democrats, Nick Clegg

Dear CaSE,

Thank you for your letter enquiring about the Liberal Democrats' ambitions for the UK's scientific future.

The Liberal Democrats recognise that science and engineering skills, and innovation drive improvements in quality of life and wellbeing, as well as economic success. The UK's science base is extraordinary – our cutting edge research base is world leading, our universities are world-class, we attract the world's brightest minds and we are second in the world when ranked by Nobel prizes.

That said, the UK has historically invested less in research and development than our competitor nations, so we can and will go further to promote science and engineering. I've set out below the Liberal Democrats' priorities that will build on our world-leading capability in science and engineering in the next Parliament to support further innovation and maximise our competitive edge in the global economy.

Boosting Investment in Research and Development

Investment in research and development is critical to the current and future economic success of the UK. There are big opportunities (such as the growing potential of genomics) but also big challenges (such as antimicrobial resistance). We must rise to these challenges by supporting innovation and the transformation of our cutting edge science into new products and services. This will create new jobs, innovative businesses and allow the UK to take the lead in new markets. To support science and innovation we:

- Aim to double innovation and research spending across the economy, supported by greater public funding on a longer timescale, more 'Catapult' innovation and technology centres, and more support for green innovation from the Green Investment Bank.
- Will continue to ringfence the science budget and ensure that, by 2020, both capital and revenue spending have increased at least in line with inflation.

Providing High Quality Science and Engineering Education

Liberal Democrats recognise the importance of encouraging and inspiring more children to study STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) and ensuring that they are well taught in schools and universities. Curiosity in the way the world works is to be encouraged for its own sake, to build deeper understanding, as well as for economic growth. That is why we will:

- Encourage schools at primary level to have at least one science specialist among the staff, and at secondary level work to maximise the number of teachers who have degree qualifications in the subjects they teach.
- Continue to support the Teach First programme to attract high calibre graduates into teaching, in particular in STEM subjects.
- Promote the take up of STEM subjects in schools, retain coding on the National Curriculum and encourage entrepreneurship at all levels.

Ensuring Britain has a Highly Skilled and Diverse Workforce

Liberal Democrats believe we should welcome talented people from abroad so that Britain has the highly skilled and diverse workforce it needs to deliver a balanced economy with strengths in every part of the UK. We need to ensure that immigration rules do not place arbitrary barriers in the way of skilled individuals coming to or remaining in the UK. In the next Parliament we will:

- Ensure that the UK is an attractive destination for overseas students, not least those who wish to study STEM subjects.
- Reinstate post-study work visas for STEM graduates who can find graduate-level employment within six months of completing their degree.

Please be assured the Liberal Democrats will build on the UK's capability in science and engineering so that it continues to be one of the most high-performing and successful science bases in the world.

Below is the response from the leader of the Green Party, Natalie Bennett

Dear CaSE,

As a science graduate (Agricultural Science, Sydney, 1987), I have a personal interest in science policy.

The Green Party wants to double public spending on research over the next 10 years, reaching 1% of GDP, (the level reached or neared by South Korea, the US and France), with a focus on adequately funded basic research. The Green Party is also committed to a particular focus on research on major environmental issues such as climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. Funding would follow the Haldane principle, with the Government guiding overall strategic direction, but researchers making the decision on projects to be funded.

In keeping with the CaSE recommendations for Priority Actions, we would ensure the results of all publicly funded research, including clinical trials, were publically available, encouraging, and where necessarily financially supporting, publication in open access journals. All research carried out at universities, even if privately funded, would be subject to the Freedom of Information Act. And we will work to ensure that libel laws cannot be used to stifle scientific debate or academic freedom.

To support the pool of people to drive scientific success, we would remove undergraduate tuition fees, and reintroduce student grants, helping students to focus on their studies and develop their careers without the heavy weight of debt influencing their career choices.

On immigration, we are opposed to the artificial, arbitrary cap on immigration, supporting a controlled but fair and humane system. We are opposed to the discriminatory and often hostile treatment being encountered by non-EU postgraduate students, and would restore the post-study work visa that allowed postgraduates to seek work in the UK for two years. We would also ensure that visas and immigration rules did not prevent or obstruct the employment of non-EU academics and experts required by science, engineering and other businesses.

Our policy would be supportive of non-standard career structures, aiming to ensure that training and expertise is maintained and utilised, particularly focusing on the current “leaky pipeline” that sees women lost from careers in STEM subjects. I support mandatory bias training for all members of grant-awarding boards and panels across all Research Councils.

For schools, we are committed to reducing the complexity and competitive structure of free schools and academies, bringing these back under local authority control, with a stable, cooperative structure that aims for the best result for each pupil and enables a diverse, creative curriculum with a strong scientific and practical component.

The Green Party is committed to evidence-based policymaking in government, and I support the maintenance of the post with ministerial responsibility for science and engineering policy in the Cabinet. For example, we are committed to supporting expert advice on treating illegal drug use as a health issue rather than a criminal justice issue. We are strongly committed to providing on the NHS only those treatments and preventative health measures which have been independently tested using the best available clinical evidence. We have also opposed the unscientific (and inhumane) badger cull.

We are committed to ensuring that scientific advisors (with an independent chief scientific adviser attached to each relevant department) work in an environment of academic freedom and are able to make recommendations without political interference or fear of dismissal. And we are committed to publishing all submissions to government enquiries.

We strongly support the development of renewable energy technologies and their roll out, want to see much increased research and extension work on ecologically sustainable agriculture, and seek research and engineering solutions in all areas of energy efficiency and transport.

Below is the response from the leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage.

Dear CaSE,

I can assure you that we take a keen interest in advancing science and technology. To that end UKIP has pledged to abolish tuition fees for STEM degrees for students who work within the UK for the following five years after graduating.

UKIP will be taking up CaSE’s suggestion to require every primary school to nominate a science leader to inspire and equip the next generation. Not only do we believe this is a good way to help address the gender imbalance in the scientific subjects, it will also encourage students onto STEM subjects at university.

As I’m sure you know, UKIP also advocates leaving the European Union and reviewing the wealth of EU regulations and directives as passed into British law. This will obviously include regulations which relate to science and technology issues and which, in our opinion, have been unnecessarily restrictive when it

comes to research and/or have hampered smaller-scale research projects which cannot get off the ground because of the cost of the weight of regulation they will have to comply with. I give by way of example, the Clinical Trials Directive. This was intended to simplify and harmonise clinical trials across the EU, but has in fact decimated the number of clinical trials in Britain.

On leaving the EU, UKIP will introduce a points based immigration system which will give priority to those seeking to enter the UK to fill the skills gaps we have in our economy. At the present time, it is therefore likely that those with STEM expertise would be given priority.

We are determined to address the skills shortage in science and engineering and trust these practical policies will address the issue.

Below is the response from Plaid Cymru.

Dear CaSE,

Science and technology is key in developing the Welsh economy. This is reflected in our policies across the board and we will press for these in any post-election agreements.

Plaid Cymru affirms that harnessing science and technology in the service of both humanity and the environment is crucial to the long term health of both our local and the global environment. We want to place Wales at the forefront of environmentally sound and socially responsible technical innovations. This means putting a distinct emphasis on scientific research.

We believe more investment is needed, through our higher education establishments, in scientific and technological research. We would press for Welsh universities to get more UK-based research funding and to get the best investment from the European Union's Horizon 2020 funding. We would use this to enable our universities to work more closely with industry, promoting research and development related to universities such as the Menai Science Park that is being developed as a result of our 2012 Budget deal.

To ensure that Wales is in a position to maintain and progress in the field of science we need to increase our children's ability in mathematics and scientific subjects, and to invest more, through our higher education establishments, in scientific and technological research. Numeracy alone is not enough in the 21st century.

Plaid Cymru believes that, in principle, higher education should be free for all, and we will continue to work towards this aim. We will provide a subsidy to students resident in Wales who wish to study in Wales. Target groups and those studying subjects vital to the Welsh economy and public goals will pay no tuition fees in Wales, including those taking up key healthcare posts, studying science, engineering and technology subjects and students from particularly challenging backgrounds.

Plaid Cymru does not believe the current migration laws are fit for purpose in Wales. Wales has a far lower number of migrants from outside the UK than England or Scotland. We are calling for a Welsh Migration Service to ensure that migration meets Welsh. Our public services need skilled migrants to work here and help our economy to improve. This includes more scientists and students to ensure the sustainability of our economy. We would also re-introduce a post-study work visa for two years for students who have qualified from Welsh universities so that they can use their skills to contribute to the Welsh economy.

UK science has developed in the past 5 years, but there is always much more that can be done. One area in which this is vital is health. Plaid Cymru will work to ensure that Wales improves its share of health research funding, attracting high quality researchers to Wales. We also support the All Trials campaign for publication of all clinical trials to make sure our clinical staff and researchers have the most comprehensive and up-to-date evidence-based information. We support embryonic and adult stem cell research which may lead to scientific developments.

We are against the growth of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in Wales and support a GMO-free British Isles and Europe on the precautionary principle. We have concerns about the impact of cross-pollination if the UK Government pushes ahead with plans to introduce GMO-crops in England.

Plaid Cymru is also committed to tackling climate change. We will introduce a Climate Change Act for Wales, adopting challenging but achievable greenhouse gas reduction targets for 2030 and 2050. Our energy policy will focus on increasing energy generation from renewable sources, with particular emphasis on tidal and hydro sources, such as the proposed tidal lagoons, and reducing our reliance on fossil fuels.

Below is the response from the Office of the Scottish Chief Scientific Advisor

Dear CaSE,

The Scottish Government recognises that Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics are key to achieving the overall goal of creating a more successful Scotland and are committed to positioning Scotland as a nation of innovation. As the SNP is the current administration in Scotland, please allow me to answer your queries with examples of policy in action.

The Scottish Government's enterprise agencies, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, deliver a range of funding to assist Scottish based businesses including: Innovation Grants under the SMART: SCOTLAND scheme, which provides financial assistance to SMEs to help support commercially viable projects which represent a significant technological advance for the UK sector or industry concerned; Research and Development Grants supporting businesses developing new products, processes and services to benefit the Scottish economy; Horizon 2020 funding to support and promote Europe-wide research and innovation whilst bridging the gap between research and the market. The Scottish government recently announced 14 million capital investment in Scotland's Innovation Centres. The investment is improving the links between education and industry further, and is building on £110 million already committed to the sector. Innovation Centres are collaborations between universities, businesses and others to enhance innovation in and across Scotland's key economic sectors. Another important initiative is Interface, a central hub connecting businesses from a wide variety of national and international industries to Scotland's 19 higher education and research institutes.

You have raised the issue of ensuring that we have a diverse pool of talented people driving our future scientific success. Although Immigration is a reserved issue, the Scottish Government recognises that geographical boundaries should not hinder scientific advancement. Scotland's Universities have local and global networks and collaborations. Skills Development Scotland (SDS) supports the people and businesses of Scotland to develop and apply their skills and in support of youth employment, SDS is one of the delivery partners for the Scottish Government's guaranteed offer of a place in education or training for all 16 to 19-year-olds through Opportunities for All. The Scottish Government supports the European Commission in its desire for a reinforced European research area partnership for excellence

and growth. One of the mechanisms for supporting this initiative was the EU Framework Programme for research and innovation. Figures show that up to 1 November 2013, almost €636 million funding had been secured by Scottish organisations.

In order to ensure that STEM is made as accessible as possible to the general public and school pupils, the Scottish Government funds a number of organisations, initiatives and projects that support young people's science learning, promote science careers, showcase Scotland's world-leading research base, and make science accessible to a wide public audience. These include funding allocated to: the four science centres in Scotland (including community and transport subsidies to target those in areas of deprivation) and 15 regional science festivals in 2014-15 to support their education programmes; a number national STEM initiatives for schools; and the Talking Science grant scheme for 2014-15 that supported organisations in return for targeting science engagement activities at hard-to-reach public audiences, including families, young people, and adults, in rural/remote areas or areas of deprivation. All this work complements and aligns with the aims and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence. Schools are encouraged to work closely with a range of partners to deliver learning, and pupils have opportunities for valuable learning experiences outside of the classroom. In a complementary manner, those receiving government funding are required by condition of grant to ensure that such initiatives and activities align with the Curriculum for Excellence. Furthermore, the Scottish Government believes access to University education should be based on the ability to learn not the ability to pay, which is why Scottish domiciled students are exempt from tuition fees.

Lastly, the Scottish Government recognises the importance of using scientific expertise to inform policy making and accordingly has an independent Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland. It is the role of the Chief Scientific Adviser to ensure scientific advice is considered when making policy. As part of this role, the Chief Scientific Adviser for Scotland co-chairs the Scottish Science Advisory Council as the highest level mechanism for ensuring we have access to independent advice and recommendations on science strategy, policy and priorities.

Below is the response from the leader of the Alliance Party, Mr David Ford

Dear CaSE,

Alliance is committed to promoting science and has delivered significantly on this commitment in the past. For example, Stephen Farry MLA, the Minister for Employment and Learning, has

- Created 1350 Additional STEM Undergraduate Places
- Increased in publically funded PhDs, a number of which are in economically relevant areas

Through this, we have actively promoted science and engineering in Northern Ireland through those levers at our disposal. However, science is a policy area which is spread across both devolved- and non-devolved areas and we are committed to ensuring that the potential for science in Northern Ireland is maximised.

In Westminster, Alliance MPs will work on those areas highlighted by CaSE in their letter.

1. Boost government and business investment in UK research and development

In Westminster we will support the following changes to improve the standing of science:

- Increase investment in science and research through the UK Research Councils. There is a clear link globally between state investment in science and economic prosperity.
- Support Northern Ireland's university to draw down greater levels of science and research funding from both the Research Councils and the European Union.
- Audit what scientific infrastructure is lacking in the UK and ensure this is considered as part of the UK's scientific investment programmes.
- Specifically identify what gap exists in both funding and infrastructure for science in Northern Ireland.

2. Ensure that the UK has the diverse pool of talented people it needs to drive our future scientific success

We believe that one of the factors that will best ensure that talented people look for scientific success in the Northern Ireland (and the rest of the UK) will be to ensure we have the best possible environment in which to practise. This will allow the most qualified scientists to operate from within Northern Ireland.

From the perspective of Northern Ireland, developing an economy based on high-tech and scientific jobs will be essential to prevent people with scientific skills leaving for employment elsewhere.

3. Ensure that a high quality science and engineering education is encouraged and open to all

It is widely accepted that we need a workforce that has strong skills in the STEM subjects: science, technology, engineering and maths. Research has shown there will be a growing demand for individuals trained and educated in these subject areas.

However, this increasing demand is set against a backdrop of a declining number of young people choosing to study STEM related subjects at school, college and university in Northern Ireland.

Encouraging an increase in the number of individuals holding STEM related qualifications is key to ensuring a workforce that is able to contribute toward areas regarded as having future growth potential both here and internationally, e.g. advanced manufacturing, ICT, low carbon industries and agri-foods. Understanding and competency in STEM subjects is also required to increase levels of research and development in Northern Ireland and to provide businesses with the skills to absorb innovation into their working practices.

The Alliance Employment and Learning Minister in Northern Ireland is implementing the Skills Strategy, including its targets to increase participation in STEM subjects, and the specific STEM Strategy. A particular focus is around gender representation.

The implementation of our wider skills policy objectives and the embedding of STEM as a key driver within the skills agenda will also support an increase in uptake. Areas such as agri-food, the green economy, pharmaceuticals, finance and ICT will be supported through the drive to improve STEM.

4. Improve the use of scientific expertise to inform policy-making in government

Alliance has long ensured that they support evidence-based decision-making. However, we are increasingly concerned that on some issues, particularly in the health service, priority is not being given to medical evidence in the decision-making process.

Alliance MPs will continue to ensure that scientific and technical evidence is taken into account when formulating legislation and when scrutinising government.

Below is the response from the SDLP.

Dear CaSE,

I can reassure you that we will be putting a heavy emphasis on the promotion of STEM subjects in the curriculum across all stages of schooling and we will make it a priority that children in Northern Ireland have the opportunity to be taught computer programming from the age of 8.

Below is the response from the DUP Spokesperson on Economic & Finance matters and Education, Science and Technology , Sammy Wilson.

Dear CaSE,

Thank you very much for your letter and for the enclosed information regarding the case for science and engineering investment.

I fully understand the importance of investment in these areas of the economy. It is something which as a Party we have given priority to through the Northern Ireland Executive where obviously we do have a greater degree of influence than perhaps we have at Westminster and I appreciate you giving me some ideas in the information you have passed on.