

Letter - Science advice to MPs faces cuts

7th November 2015

The following letter was sent to the Chairman and the members of the House of Commons Commission.

The Rt Hon John Bercow MP
Chairman
The House of Commons Commission
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Chairman,

There are precious few issues on which all the political parties are in agreement.

Thankfully when it comes to government spending and priorities there is a clear understanding that investment in science and engineering should be maintained even during difficult economic times, increased in the longer term and ring-fenced from other budgets. It is rightly recognised that world-class research and development feeds through to the economy, education and rational public policy. We are alarmed to learn that Parliament is not taking the same approach.

New science and emerging technologies are having an ever greater impact on society and, concomitantly, parliamentary priorities; research, science and technology are critical components of every aspect of public policy. Meanwhile, the House of Commons has a deficit of Members with a scientific or engineering background. We are of the view that the role of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) has never been more important.

POST has recently appointed a new Director and is currently piloting some innovative and ambitious projects to make POST's already excellent analysis and advice increasingly relevant to the immediate needs of Parliament. We recognise that fiscal conditions are tough, but a salami-slicing approach to budget cutting is not the way forward. POST's budget should be protected and ring-fenced from other budgets to ensure that its bicameral, independent and peer-reviewed analysis and advice remains available to Parliamentarians and to give it the freedom to continue to develop.

Sincerely,

Imran Khan, Director, Campaign for Science and Engineering
Kate Baillie, Chief Executive, Biochemical Society
Dr Peter Banister, President, British Psychological Society
Ian Blatchford, Director, the Science Museum Group
Dr David Brown, Chief Executive, Institution of Chemical Engineers
Tracey Brown, Managing Director, Sense About Science
Jonathan Bruun, Chief Executive, British Pharmacological Society
Dr Mark Downs, Chief Executive, Society of Biology
Dr Ian Gibson, Former Chair, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology

Dr Ben Goldacre, Doctor and science writer
Professor Paul Hardaker, Chief Executive, Institute of Physics
Professor Andrew Hopper, President, The Institution of Engineering and Technology
Sir Roland Jackson, Chief Executive, British Science Association
Professor Peter Jarritt, President, Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine
Susan Kay, Executive Director, Engineering Professors Council
Lord John Krebs, Board member, Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology
Professor Sir Harry Kroto, Nobel laureate
Professor Robert Mackay, President, Institute of Mathematics and its Applications
Lord Bob May, Former President of the Royal Society, Government Chief Scientific Adviser
Edmund Nickless, Executive Secretary, Geological Society
Paul Noon, General Secretary, Prospect
Dr Robert Parker, Chief Executive, Royal Society of Chemistry
Professor Simon Singh, Science writer and broadcaster
Professor David Southwood, President, Royal Astronomical Society
Ian Taylor, Former Science Minister, Chair of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee
Stephen Tetlow, Chief Executive, Institution of Mechanical Engineers
Lord William Waldegrave, Provost of Eton College, Former Science Minister
Dr Philip Wright, Chief Executive, Physiological Society