

Letters from the EU Party Leaders 2014

In the run-up to the 2014 European Elections, CaSE and Euroscience published the responses of the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats, UKIP, the Green Party, Plaid Cymru and the SNP, to our questions on their EU science and engineering policies covering research, skills, innovation and evidence-based policymaking.

Scottish National Party (SNP) response from Alasdair Allan MSP

Thank you for your letter to Alex Salmond MP, First Minister, referring to the letter and briefing you sent to Alyn Smith MEP. Mr Salmond has asked me to respond as your letter relates to my portfolio interests. Please accept my apologies for missing your response deadline of 1 May.

The Scottish Government's priority in Europe is to ensure that the EU budget helps deliver strong sustainable economic growth in Scotland and creates the conditions for the Scottish economy to grow, both at home and internationally.

This priority is supported by Scotland's great strengths in and a long-standing reputation for science and engineering. The Scottish Government is therefore committed to ensuring that science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills help to grow our businesses.

Through the development of Skills Investment Plan, we are working with industry to better understand their current and future skills need. These plans identify actions to better align the public sector funded skills provision with the needs of industry. A number of the plans relevant to Science and Engineering have already been published, including Energy, Life Sciences, and ICT & Digital Technology, with plans for Engineering, Constructions and Chemical Sciences due for publication later this year.

Developing these skills further through our world class Universities is equally as important. The best research operates across boundaries whether they are disciplinary, institutional or national and research excellence is underpinned by extensive collaboration across the globe. Scotland's Universities have networks and collaborations across Scotland, the UK, Europe and internationally. We support the European Commission in its ambitions of a reinforced European research areas partnership for excellence and growth with researchers, research institutions and business moving, competing and co-operating across borders more intensively.

One of the mechanisms for supporting these activities is the EU Framework programme for research and innovation. Scotland performed well in the FP7. Figures show that up to 1 November 2013, almost 636 million Euros funding has been secured by Scottish organisations.

The new EU framework programme, Horizon 2020, offers even greater opportunities for our dynamic businesses and world class academics to collaborate with one another and with international partners to develop new products and services to address and tackle the societal challenges we face. To encourage participation in the programme the Scottish Government and its partners provide a range of assistance to encourage and support the ambitions of our businesses and academic institutes in their engagement with Europe.

You have also asked for an outline of our policy with regard to EU funding of science after the Scottish referendum. This government plans to ensure that levels of public investment in university research are at least maintained as part of wider and longer terms plans to harness increased funding from the private sector and other sources including Horizon 2020. We have recently published a paper on Higher Education Research in an Independent Scotland which includes further details on our continued collaboration with Europe. I have attached a link to this publication along with one for Scotland's Future – Your Guide to an Independent Scotland.

All of this flows from good policy making and we recognise the importance of science and engineering evidence and advice in public policy in a debate held in the Scottish Parliament in December 2012. This is why the Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) for Scotland, Professor Muffy Calder, 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. Our previous CSA, Professor Anne Glover, became the first CSA to the European Commission.