



HOUSE OF COMMONS SELECT COMMITTEES 2015

The Chairs of all the House of Commons Select Committees were elected by a secret ballot of the House of Commons on Thursday 18th June.

BUSINESS INNOVATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the administration, expenditure and policy of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and its associated public bodies, including the Office of Fair Trading (OFT).

Mr Iain Wright (Labour, Hartlepool) was elected Chair. Other members of the Committee, formally appointed on Wednesday 8 July, are: Paul Blomfield (Labour, Sheffield Central); Richard Fuller (Conservative, Bedford); Peter Kyle (Labour, Hove); Amanda Milling (Conservative, Cannock Chase); Amanda Solloway (Conservative, Derby North); Jo Stevens (Labour, Cardiff Central); Michelle Thomson (Scottish National Party, Edinburgh West); Kelly Tolhurst (Conservative, Rochester and Strood); Craig Tracey (Conservative, North Warwickshire); Chris White (Conservative, Warwick and Leamington).

INQUIRY

On 20 July the Committee announced an Inquiry into the Government's Productivity Plan, exploring whether the Productivity Plan addresses the main causes of low productivity in the UK and whether it is likely to achieve its desired results. The Productivity Plan covers a wide range of areas, including the tax regime for businesses, skills, science and innovation, digital infrastructure, investment and trade. Written evidence was sought, to be submitted by 10 September.

Contact: Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. Telephone: 020 7219 5777; Email: biscom@parliament.uk

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The Education Committee monitors the policy, administration and spending of the Department for Education and its associated arms' length bodies, including Ofsted.

Mr Neil Carmichael (Conservative, Stroud) was elected Chair. Other members of the Committee, formally appointed on Thursday 6 July, are: Lucy Allan (Conservative, Telford); Ian Austin (Labour,

Dudley N); Michelle Donelan (Conservative, Chippenham); Marion Fellows (Scottish National Party, Motherwell and Wishaw); Suella Fernandes (Conservative, Fareham); Lucy Frazer (Conservative, SE Cambridgeshire); Kate Hollern (Labour, Blackburn); Ian Mearns (Labour, Gateshead); Caroline Nokes (Conservative, Romsey and Southampton N); Kate Osamor (Labour Co-op, Edmonton).

INQUIRIES

The work of Ofsted

On 16 July the Committee announced an inquiry into the work of Ofsted and called for written evidence (to be submitted by Tuesday 1 September) ahead of a one-off evidence session with Sir Michael Wilshaw, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, to be held on Wednesday 16 September.

Regional Schools Commissioners

On 20 July the Committee announced an inquiry into The role of Regional Schools Commissioners. The Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) were appointed in 2014 to work with school leaders to promote and monitor academies and free schools. This inquiry explores the expanding role of RSCs, their resources, impact and accountability.

Contact: Education Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

Telephone: 020 7219 1376;
Email: educom@parliament.uk

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITTEE

The Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and its associated public bodies.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Scottish National Party, Na h-Eileanan an Iar) was elected Chair. Other members, appointed 8 July, are: Rt Hon Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrats, Orkney and Shetland); Glyn Davies (Conservative, Montgomeryshire); James Heapey

(Conservative, Wells); Ian Lavery (Labour, Wansbeck); Melanie Onn (Labour, Great Grimsby); Matthew Pennycook (Labour, Greenwich and Woolwich); Dr Poulter (Conservative, Central Suffolk and North Ipswich); Antoinette Sandbach (Conservative, Eddisbury); Julian Sturdy (Conservative, York Outer); Dr Alan Whitehead (Labour, Southampton Test).

INQUIRIES

DECC priorities 2015

On 15 July the Committee announced an inquiry into DECC priorities 2015 and on Tuesday 21 July held a one-off evidence session with the Secretary of State looking at the Department's priorities and objectives for 2015 and for this Parliament. The evidence is published on the website.

ECC priorities for holding Government to account

On 16 July the Committee announced an enquiry looking to gather views on which areas of DECC's policies will require particular scrutiny over the years to come to inform the Committee's future work programme and its priorities for holding Government to account.

Contact: Energy and Climate Change Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Telephone: 020 7219 2158; Email: ecc@parliament.uk

ENVIRONMENT FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRA) is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and its associated public bodies.

Mr Neil Parish (Conservative, Tiverton and Honiton) was elected Chair. Other members (appointed on 8 July) are: Sarah Champion (Labour, Rotherham); Chris Davies (Conservative, Brecon and Radnorshire); Jim Fitzpatrick (Labour, Poplar and Limehouse); Harry Harpham (Labour, Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough); Simon Hart (Conservative, Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire); Dr Paul Monaghan (Scottish National Party, Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross); Rebecca Pow (Conservative, Taunton Deane); Margaret Ritchie (Social Democratic & Labour Party, South Down); David Simpson (Democratic Unionist Party, Upper Bann); Rishi Sunak (Conservative, Richmond).

INQUIRIES

The 2015 EFRA Committee is appealing to the public to tell it what key issues should be addressed this Parliament.

Tweet them @CommonsEFRA using #EFRAtopics – or send 100 words via email to efracom@parliament.uk with the subject line: EFRA Topics.

Contact: Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. Telephone: 020 7219 5774/3262; Email: efracom@parliament.uk

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE

The remit of the Environmental Audit Committee is to consider the extent to which the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development, and to audit their performance against sustainable development and environmental protection targets.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Labour, Ogmore) was elected Chair. The remaining members of the Committee were appointed on Monday 20 July 2015: Peter Aldous (Conservative, Waveney); Caroline Ansell (Conservative, Eastbourne); Jo Churchill (Conservative, Bury St Edmunds) Zac Goldsmith (Conservative, Richmond Park); Margaret Greenwood (Labour, Wirral West); Luke Hall (Conservative, Thornbury and Yate); Carolyn Harris (Labour, Swansea East); Peter Heaton-Jones (Conservative, North Devon); Mr Peter Lilley (Conservative, Hitchin and Harpenden); Caroline Lucas (Green Party, Brighton Pavilion); Holly Lynch (Labour, Halifax); John Mc Nally (Scottish National Party, Falkirk); Rebecca Pow (Conservative, Taunton Deane); Jeff Smith (Labour, Manchester Withington); Rory Stewart (Conservative, Penrith and The Border).

INQUIRIES

The Government's approach to sustainable development

On 21 July the Committee announced an inquiry into the Government's approach to sustainable development. The Committee will be exploring what impact the new Government's fiscal and legislative agenda will have on sustainable development. It will be looking to establish themes for its work during the Parliament and measures against which the Government's success can be judged.

The Airports Commission report: Carbon emissions, air quality and noise

On 23 July the Committee announced an inquiry into the Airports Commission report and the implications for Government commitments on carbon emissions, air quality and noise should the Airport Commission's recommendation of a third runway at Heathrow Airport be adopted.

Contact: Environmental Audit Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

Telephone: 020 7219 6150; Email: ecom@parliament.uk

HEALTH COMMITTEE

The Health Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the policy, administration and expenditure of the Department of Health and its associated bodies

Dr Sarah Wollaston was elected Chair. The remaining members of the Committee, who were elected by the House on Wednesday 8 July, are: Dr James Davies (Conservative, Vale of Clwyd); Andrea Jenkyns (Conservative, Morley and Outwood); Liz McInnes (Labour, Heywood and Middleton); Rachael Maskell (Labour Co-op, York Central); Andrew Percy (Conservative, Brigg and Goole); Paula Sherriff (Labour, Dewsbury); Emily Thornberry (Labour, Islington South and Finsbury); Maggie Throup (Conservative, Erewash); Helen Whately (Conservative, Faversham and Mid Kent); Dr Philippa Whitford (Scottish National Party, Central Ayrshire).

INQUIRIES

Current issues in NHS England

On 14 July the Committee announced an inquiry into Current issues in NHS England. It will review the current performance of the NHS and examine how NHS England is planning to implement the vision outlined in the Five Year Forward view.

On 21 July the Committee took evidence from NHS England's Chief Executive Simon Stevens, Sir Bruce Keogh, Medical Director and Jane Cummings, the Chief Nursing Officer for England. The evidence is published on the Committee's website.

Primary care

On 30 July the Committee announced an inquiry into challenges affecting primary care services in England. It will consider whether the Department of Health and its arms' length bodies have the plans and policies in place now to ensure that high quality care is consistently available to patients at the point of need.

Contact: Health Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Telephone: 020 7219 6182; Email: healthcom@parliament.uk

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Science and Technology Committee exists to ensure that Government policy and decision-making are based on good scientific and engineering advice and evidence. The Science and Technology Committee is unusual amongst departmental select committees in that it scrutinises the Government Office for Science (GO-Science), which is a "semi-autonomous organisation" based within the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). GO-Science "supports the Government Chief Scientific Adviser and works to ensure that Government policy and decision-making is underpinned by robust scientific evidence". The committee therefore has a similarly broad remit and can examine the activities of departments where they have implications for, or made use of, science, engineering, technology and research.

Nicola Blackwood (Conservative, Oxford West and Abingdon) was elected as Chair. The other members, appointed on 13 July, are: Victoria Borwick (Conservative, Kensington); Jim Dowd (Labour, Lewisham West and Penge); Chris Green (Conservative, Bolton West); Dr Tania Mathias (Conservative, Twickenham); Liz McInnes (Labour, Heywood and Middleton); Carol Monaghan (Scottish National Party, Glasgow North West); Graham Stringer (Labour, Blackley and Broughton); Derek Thomas (Conservative, St Ives); Matt Warman (Conservative, Boston and Skegness); Daniel Zeichner (Labour, Cambridge).

INQUIRIES

The Science Budget

On 10 July the Committee announced an inquiry into the Science Budget, ahead of the Spending Review. The deadline for written submission was Wednesday 26 August 2015.

On 15 July the Committee took evidence from Jo Johnson MP, Minister of State for Universities and Science, Gareth Davies, Director General, Knowledge and Innovation, and Philippa Lloyd, Director General, People and Strategy, Department for Business,

Innovation and Skills; Sir Paul Nurse, President, The Royal Society, Professor Richard Parker, Chair, Research and Secondments Committee, Royal Academy of Engineering, Lord Stern of Brentford, President, British Academy, and Professor Sir John Tooke, President, Academy of Medical Sciences. The oral evidence is published on the Committee's website.

Science in emergencies

On 20 July the Science and Technology Committee announced an inquiry into science in emergencies after the Ebola outbreak, examining what lessons have been drawn concerning the use of scientific advice in the UK for similar disease outbreak emergencies in future.

The Big Data Dilemma

On 24 July the Committee announced an inquiry into opportunities and risks of big data. The committee will look at whether the Government is doing enough to ensure that UK entrepreneurs can benefit from the data revolution, and at data protection and privacy issues.

Contact: Science and Technology Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Telephone: 020 7219 2793; Fax: 020 7219 0896;

Email: scitechcom@parliament.uk

TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

The Transport Committee examines the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department of Transport and its associated public bodies.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Labour, Liverpool, Riverside) was elected Chair. The remaining members of the Committee, appointed on 8 July, are: Robert Ffello (Labour, Stoke-on-Trent South); Mary Glindon (Labour, North Tyneside); Karl McCartney (Conservative, Lincoln); Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Scottish National Party, Glasgow South); Mark Menzies (Conservative, Fylde); Huw Merriman (Conservative, Bexhill and Battle); Will Quince (Conservative, Colchester); Iain Stewart (Conservative, Milton Keynes South); Graham Stringer (Labour, Blackley and Broughton); Martin Vickers (Conservative, Cleethorpes).

INQUIRY

The Department for Transport and rail policy

On 14 July the Committee announced an inquiry into the Department of Transport and rail policy, and took evidence from the Secretary of State on Monday 20 July. The evidence is on the Committee's website.

Contact: Transport Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Telephone: 020 7219 3266; Email: transcom@parliament.uk;

Twitter: @CommonsTrans



HOUSE OF LORDS SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY SELECT COMMITTEE

The members of the Committee (appointed 8 June 2015) are: the Earl of Selborne (Chairman), Lord Cameron of Dillington, Lord Fox, Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield, Lord Hunt of Chesterton, Lord Kakkar, Baroness Manningham-Buller, Lord Maxton, the Duke of Montrose, Baroness Morgan of Huyton, Baroness Neville-Jones, Lord Peston, Viscount Ridley and Lord Vallance of Tummel.

GM Insects

In July 2015, the Committee launched an inquiry into GM Insects. Written submissions were sought by 18 September and oral evidence will be taken in the autumn. The Committee intends to report before the end of the year.

The Relationship between EU Membership and the effectiveness of Science, Research and Innovation in the UK

In July 2015, the Committee agreed to conduct an inquiry into the relationship between EU Membership and the effectiveness of science, research and innovation in the UK. A Call for Evidence will be issued in September and oral evidence will proceed later this year.

The Dowling Review

On 7 July 2015, the Committee held an oral evidence session on the Dowling Review, hearing from Professor Dame Ann Dowling DBE, FRS, FREng, President of the Royal Academy of Engineering and Dr Hayaatun Sillem, Director of Programmes and Fellowship, the Royal Academy of Engineering. The transcript is available on the Committee's website.

Nuclear Fusion

On 21 July 2015, the Committee held an oral evidence session on the topic of nuclear fusion. The Committee heard from: Professor Steven Cowley FRS, FREng, Chief Executive Officer, UK Atomic Energy Authority, Professor of Physics at Imperial College London and Head of the EURATOM/Culham Centre for Fusion Energy

(CCFE) Fusion Association; Dr David Kingham, Chief Executive Officer, Tokamak Energy; and Dr Sharon Ellis, Deputy Director, Research Councils Unit, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The transcript is available on the Committee's website.

The Resilience of the Electricity System

In July 2014, the Committee launched an inquiry into the resilience of electricity infrastructure. Responses to the Call for Evidence were invited by late September 2014. The inquiry focused on the resilience of the UK's electricity infrastructure to peaks in demand and sudden shocks. It was interested in the resilience of the system both in the short term (to 2020) and in the medium term (to 2030) as electricity generation is decarbonised. Oral evidence was taken across the autumn and concluded in late January 2015. The Committee reported on 12 March 2015. A Government response was published in June 2015. A debate in the Chamber on the report and the Government response is being sought.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The reports, Government responses, written and oral evidence to the Committee's inquiries mentioned above, as well as the Calls for Evidence and other documents can be found on the Committee's website. Further information about the work of the Committee can be obtained from Chris Clarke, Committee Clerk, clarkechr@parliament.uk or 020 7219 4963. The Committee Office email address is hlscience@parliament.uk.



PARLIAMETARY OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (POST)



RECENT POST PUBLICATIONS

Sugar and Health

May 2015

POSTnote 493

Sugars can be added to food and drinks or occur naturally in fruit, vegetables and milk. A high sugar diet increases the risk of tooth decay and weight gain, and high consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks is associated with type 2 diabetes. This paper describes trends in sugar consumption in the UK, the public health implications and outlines policy options.

UK Broadband Infrastructure

May 2015

POSTnote 494

The growing use of smart phones and data intensive services (such as video streaming), has increased demand for both fixed and mobile internet. This POSTnote looks at patterns in broadband access and use, and the technical and policy challenges of enhancing UK broadband infrastructure to meet future needs.

Obesity Treatments

June 2015

POSTnote 495

A quarter of adults in the UK are clinically obese and therefore at an increased risk of developing chronic diseases. NHS advice is to eat fewer calories and take more exercise to lose weight. Increasingly, drug treatments and surgery are being considered as a means to lose weight for extremely obese people who have had difficulty in adhering to lifestyle changes. This briefing discusses the current methods used to manage and treat obesity.

Trends in Transport

June 2015

POSTnote 496

Transport is a key driver of economic growth. It links people to their workplaces and connects businesses. It also affects health, the environment and societal wellbeing. This POSTnote looks at why transport is changing, outlines current trends across and within transport sectors and considers the planning of transport networks.

Regulation of Synthetic Biology

June 2015

POSTnote 497

Synthetic biology can be defined as the design and engineering of novel biologically-based

parts, devices and systems or the redesign of existing biological systems. It may deliver potential benefits across a wide range of applications. However, some future applications may raise social and ethical issues and challenge current regulatory systems. This POSTnote examines the potential benefits and challenges.

Trends in Political Participation

June 2015

POSTnote 498

Over the last fifty years in the UK, some aspects of participation in formal politics have decreased, such as political party membership. But new forms of participation, such as online activism, have emerged, which may become increasingly important, especially for younger people. This POSTnote discusses trends in political participation, with a focus on new forms, drivers of these trends and how UK democratic institutions are responding.

Novel Food Production

June 2015

POSTnote 499

Food production systems worldwide may have to adapt radically to meet the rising global demand for food. Emerging approaches in the food sector include controlled-environment farming, alternative animal feeds, edible insects, and lab-cultured meat. This POSTnote considers these new technologies and summarises their respective advantages and limitations.

Towards 2020 and Beyond

June 2015

POSTnote 500

This note focuses on policy drivers leading towards 2020 and beyond. It looks at the relationship between UK policy and the following drivers: people (demographics), technological change, climate change, resource security and sustainability, inequality, and governance issues.

CURRENT WORK

Biological Sciences – Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility, Health of Military Personnel, Anti-Ebola Treatments, Trends in Crime and Justice, Forensic Linguistics and Phonetics, Cognitive Biases in Court, 100,000 Genomes

Environment and Energy – Herbicide Resistance, Soils, Ecosystem Services & Food Security, Managing the UK Plutonium Stockpile, Offshore Mining, Trends in the Environment, Future of Natural Gas, Precision Agriculture, Trends in Energy, Trends in Agriculture

Physical sciences and IT – Commercial Space Activities, Trends in ICT, Automation in Military Operations

Social Sciences – Preventing extremism, Trends in Education

CONFERENCES AND SEMINARS

What Went Wrong With the Polls?

On June 10th, POST hosted a working breakfast for MPs, Peers and their staff on what may have gone wrong with pre-election polls, why the exit polls succeeded where other polls failed, and where election polling goes from here. We also asked whether polling data affected the way the campaigns were run, or even the result itself. The speakers included: Lord Finkelstein, Times journalist and peer; Professor John Curtice, Professor of Politics at the University of Strathclyde and President of the British Polling Council; Professor David Spiegelhalter, Winton Professor of the Public Understanding of Risk, University of Cambridge; Penny Young, Librarian and Director General of Information Services at the House of Commons; Professor David Firth, Professor at the University of Warwick's Department of Statistics and exit pollster; and Ben Page, Chief Executive of Ipsos MORI.

Waking Up to UK Futures

On 23rd June, POST hosted a working breakfast for MPs, Peers and their staff to discuss five areas that are the focus of the UK Government's futures work, Robotics and Autonomous Systems, Internet of Things, Financial Technologies, Cities and the Future of Ageing. It was chaired by Lord Peter Hennessy. The speakers included: Professor David Lane, Professor of Autonomous Systems Engineering at the Ocean Systems Laboratory Heriot-Watt University; Mr Stephen Pattison, Head of Government Relations, ARM Holdings; Dr Louise Beaumont, Head of Public Affairs and Marketing for GLI Finance; Professor Sir Alan Wilson, Professor of Urban and Regional Systems in the Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis at University College London; Professor Sarah Harper, Professor of Gerontology at the University of Oxford, Director of the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing and Senior Research Fellow at Nuffield College, University of Oxford; Jessica Bland, Principal Researcher in the Policy and Research team, NESTA; and Josef Hargrave, Head of coordination and delivery of global and regional foresight activities, ARUP.

Valuing our Life Support Systems Report Launch

On 25th June, POST hosted a seminar to launch the Natural Capital Initiative's 'Valuing our Life Support Systems' summit report summarising the findings of the 2014 meeting and its recommendations for future activity. It was chaired by Barry Gardiner MP. The speakers included: Professor Rosie Hails, Chair of the Natural Capital Initiative, Science Director for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Science at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH); Professor Mike Acreman, Science Area Lead on Natural Capital at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and visiting Professor at University College London; Will Evison, Assistant Director and Environmental Economist, PwC; Professor Bill Sutherland, President of the British Ecological Society and Miriam

Rothschild Professor of Conservation Biology at the University of Cambridge; and, Dr Ruth Waters, Head of Profession for the Ecosystem Approach in Natural England.

Vegetative and Minimally Conscious States

On 30th June, POST, in collaboration with the Wellcome Trust, hosted a seminar exploring the medical, legal and ethical challenges associated with the care of patients in vegetative and minimally conscious states. Medical advances mean that increasing numbers of people survive trauma, stroke, periods of low oxygenation and severe brain infections. Some, however, are left with substantially reduced consciousness in either a vegetative or minimally conscious state. It was chaired by Dr Sarah Bunn and the speakers were: Paul Woodgate, Humanities & Social Science Research Funding at the Wellcome Trust; Judy Taylor, Co-Founder and Trustee of Brain Injury is BIG; Professor Lynne Turner-Stokes, Professor of Rehabilitation at King's College London and Chair of the Royal College of Physicians' Guidelines development Group for prolonged Disorders of Consciousness; Professor David Menon, Head of Division of Anaesthesia, University of Cambridge and Honorary Consultant, Neurosciences Critical Care Unit, Addenbrooke's Hospital; and the Honourable Mr Justice Baker, Family Division Liaison Judge for the Western Circuit, Royal Courts of Justice.

Future of Natural Gas

On 16th July POST hosted a working breakfast for MPs, Peers and their staff to discuss the future of UK natural gas production, gas use in the electricity, heat and transport sectors and the gas distribution network. It was chaired by Lord Oxburgh. The speakers included: Peter Mather, Vice President Europe and Head of UK, BP; Francis Egan, CEO, Cuadrilla; Ben Caldecott, Director of Stranded Assets Programme, Oxford University; Prof Jim Watson, Research Director, UK Energy Research Centre; Amy Clemitshaw, Head of Fossil Fuel and CCS Policy, Department of Energy and Climate Change; Jo Coleman, Strategy Development Director, Energy Technologies Institute; Mark Lewis, Low Carbon Economy Manager, Tees Valley Unlimited and Dr Paul Dodds, Lecturer, University College London.

STAFF, FELLOWS AND INTERNS AT POST

Fellows

Klara Wanelik, University of Oxford, Natural Environment Research Council

Helen Snell, University of Aberdeen, Natural Environment Research Council

Jonathan Carruthers, Rothamsted Research, Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council

Claire Mawditt, Epidemiology and Public Health, University College London, Economic and Social Research Council

Samuel Murison, Social Science, Health and Medicine, King's College London, Masters intern

Daniel Slade, Geography and Planning, University of Liverpool, Economic and Social Research Council

Elo Luik, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford, Economic and Social Research Council

Claire Louise Carter, Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex, Economic and Social Research Council

David Neale, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, Economic and Social Research Council
Wybo Wiersma, Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, Economic and Social Research Council
Leila Jameel, Department of Experimental Biology, University College London, Economic and Social Research Council
Sarah Foxen, Department of Modern Languages, University of Exeter, Arts and Humanities Research Council
Sophie Stammers, Department of Philosophy, King's College London, Arts and Humanities Research Council

Ruth Nottingham, University of Nottingham, Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
Lorna Christie, University of Glasgow, Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
Harry Beeson, University of Cambridge, Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
Karla-Luise Herpoldt, Imperial College London, Royal Society of Chemistry
Joshua Rogers, University of Durham, Nuffield Foundation
Abby Casey, Imperial College London, Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council



HOUSE OF COMMONS LIBRARY SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT SECTION



Scientists and other staff in the Science and Environment Section provide confidential, bespoke briefing to Members and their offices on a daily basis. They also provide support to Commons Select Committees, and produce longer notes and research papers which can be accessed on line at <http://www.parliament.uk/topics/topical-issues.htm>

Summaries of new and recently updated briefings are opposite.

For further information contact:
Sarah Hartwell-Naguib
Head of Section
Tel: 020 7219 1665
email:
hartwellnaguibs@parliament.uk

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Reforming the Electronic Communications Code

26.5.15 | *CBP-7203*

The Electronic Communications Code, which facilitates the installation and maintenance of electronic communications networks, has long been considered in need of reform.

In early 2015 the Coalition Government tabled an amendment to the Infrastructure Bill (now the Infrastructure Act 2015) which would have substantially reformed the Code along the lines of the Law Commission's recommendations. The amendment was later dropped amid criticism from stakeholders. A nine-week consultation on reforms to the Code then followed, and closed on 30 April 2015.

In the Productivity Plan published after the summer 2015 Budget, the Conservative Government announced that it planned to introduce legislation in the first session of the (2015-20) Parliament to reform the Electronic Communications Code. This briefing paper looks at attempts to reform the Electronic Communications Code, including the Coalition Government's withdrawn amendment to the Infrastructure Bill in early 2015, and the subsequent consultation on Code reforms.

New Psychoactive Substances

4.6.15 | *CBP-7215*

New Psychoactive substances (commonly referred to as 'legal highs') are a relatively new challenge in drugs policy. This briefing covers the

background to these substances, policies to target them, the current legislative framework and the New Psychoactive Substances Bill, recently announced in the Queen's Speech.

New psychoactive substances (NPS) are designed to mimic the effects of a range of traditional controlled drugs and, in contrast to traditional illicit drug use, their use is increasing. They can be a challenge to control under existing drugs legislation and new versions of substances develop at a swift rate to attempt to avoid the current controls. As a result of this, new policies to target them have been introduced. These include Temporary class drug orders and the use of alternative legislation.

This Briefing paper provides a background to NPS, including problems of definition, speed of development and prevalence of use and their associated harms. It provides an overview of current legislation in this area, the considerations of a Government appointed expert panel review and the new Bill.

Food Waste

10.6.15 | *SN07045*

Food poverty, and a rise in food bank use, has recently brought the issue of food waste to Parliament's attention.

The House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's report, Food security: demand, consumption and waste (January 2015) called for Defra to appoint a Food Security Co-ordinator to spur a step change in the redistribution of surplus food to those in need.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger and Food Poverty suggested in its December 2014 Feeding Britain report that re-distributing and using surplus food would be the 'next big breakthrough' in eliminating hunger in the UK. It also called for the creation of a new, national network of the food industry, food banks and government working to match food needs to resources at local level.

The House of Lords EU Committee report on EU food waste, Counting the Cost of Food Waste (April 2014) highlighted a need to maintain momentum on EU food waste reduction and obtain more accurate data.

It is estimated that the UK produces 15 million tonnes of food waste annually – UK households produce almost half of this. Avoidable household food waste has reduced by 21% since 2007 but the average UK household still throws away the equivalent of six meals per week.

This note describes further the scale and implications of food waste, and sets out industry and other responses to tackle it.

Support for Science

19.6.15 | *CBP-7237*

Public funding for research comes from a mix of devolved (eg Higher Education Funding Council for England) and UK (eg Research Councils) institutions. Bodies like Innovate UK have a specific focus on industrial research. Within these broad frameworks, grants are awarded on a competitive basis.

Successive governments have sought to protect the science budget – both in terms of recurring and capital costs. The latter are increasingly being linked to earmarked projects, a recent one being the Alan Turing Institute based at the British Library. The non-capital science budget, held by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, currently stands at £4.6 billion per annum. The Conservative Party Manifesto 2015 provides an outline of the new Government's general policy commitments in this area.

Planning for Onshore wind

22.6.15 | *SN04370*

In England the planning process for onshore wind developments varies according to size. The former Government temporarily expanded the planning appeals recovery criteria to allow the Secretary of State to take the final decision on onshore wind appeals. This expired in April 2015. The new Government has not yet said whether it plans to renew this power.

This note sets out planning policy for onshore wind development, controls in place, rules on separation distances, possible community benefits and new Government proposals for change. It applies to England only.

Shale Gas and Fracking

25.6.15 | *SN06073*

Shale gas is extracted from solid rock using a process called hydraulic fracturing, or 'fracking'. The Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering have reviewed the risks associated with fracking. They concluded that the health, safety and environmental risks can be managed effectively in the UK by implementing and enforcing best operational practice. However,

they made several recommendations including calling for more research on the carbon footprint of shale gas extraction. In the UK, drilling for shale gas is at only the exploratory phase. But the rapid development of shale gas resources in North America has transformed the world gas-market outlook.

The regulatory regime for fracking in the UK is covered in this note along with comment on environmental concerns. It also covers the new access provisions and debate on fracking during the Infrastructure Bill's passage through Parliament.

The UK 4G spectrum auction and mobile coverage

20.7.15 | *SN06383*

Ofcom auctioned radio spectrum needed for 4G mobile devices in 2013, raising £2.34 billion (less than Treasury forecasts). This briefing summarises the details of the auction, potential interference with digital television and future plans for the 700 MHz lot of spectrum.

ACTIVITIES

In addition to providing bespoke briefings for MPs, and publishing briefing papers such as those highlighted above, the section has prepared debate packs, containing briefing and supporting press and parliamentary material, for debates on: Air pollution in London; Effect of Gypsies and Travellers on local communities; Opposition Day debate on Climate Change; Food Waste; Access to drugs for ultra-rare diseases; Superfast Broadband Rollout; Science and research in the UK and regional economies; Shale gas; Coastal flood risk; and Sentencing for cruelty to domestic pets.

The Section bid farewell to Michael Everett who completed a six month secondment to the section, and welcomed a new member of the team, Sara Priestley, formerly a specialist working for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

During the election dissolution the whole SES team visited the RSPB reserve in Sandy, Bedfordshire, and had a series of briefings with policy advisers there. Some of the team took up the chance to visit businesses as part of a placement scheme run by the Industry and Parliament Trust. David Hough, Sara Priestley and Ed White visited the University of Lancaster and heard about the latest developments in research into energy, environment and climate change policies and issues being undertaken by the University.

A number of the team have participated in stakeholder engagements arranged by committee staff with Imperial College, University of London, the Environment Agency and the National Farmers Union. David Hough and Grahame Danby took part in outreach events designed to help academic institutions to understand the workings of Parliament and how to communicate research findings to MPs through engagement with the Library and Select Committees.