



HOUSE OF COMMONS SELECT COMMITTEES 2015

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 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).

CURRENT INQUIRIES

Work of the Department for Business Innovation and Skills

The inquiry was announced on 8 October 2015. A single evidence session was held on 14 October, when the Committee took evidence from Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, Secretary of State, and Martin Donnelly CMG, Permanent Secretary, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

UK steel industry

The inquiry was announced on 22 October 2015 following the Tata steel redundancies. An Oral evidence session was held on 27 October.

Exports and the Role of UKTI

The inquiry into Government's export targets and how UKTI activities affect exports was announced on 29 October 2015.

Productivity Plan

The Committee announced an inquiry into the Government's Productivity Plan on 20 July 2015. Oral evidence sessions were held on 20 October and 3 November.

Assessing quality in Higher Education

On 17 September 2015 the Committee announced an inquiry looking into proposed changes to quality assessment in universities and the potential impact of introducing a Teaching Excellence Framework. The closing date for the submission of written evidence was 30th October.

Digital economy

The Committee announced an inquiry looking at Government actions affecting businesses in the digital economy on 21 September. An Oral evidence session was held on 10 November.

For the most recent information on all Inquiries and to view evidence please visit

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/business-innovation-and-skills/>

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, 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).

CURRENT INQUIRIES

Mental health and wellbeing of looked after children

On 18 September 2015 the Education Committee announced an inquiry building on the Health Committee's recent report on childrens' mental health. The Committee has published written evidence received.

The Children's Commissioner for England

The inquiry was announced on 17 September 2015; a single evidence session with Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner for England will be arranged.

Supply of teachers

The Committee launched an inquiry into recruitment and retention of teachers on 16 October 2015. The closing date for written

evidence was 20 November and it is expected that there will be an oral evidence session with the Secretary of State for Education before the end of the year.

Holocaust Education

The Education Committee announced an inquiry into the teaching of the Holocaust in schools on 21 September. Having received written evidence, it is anticipated that the Committee will hold a single oral evidence session before the end of the year.

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. The Committee held oral evidence sessions on 21 October and 4 and 17 November.

The work of Ofsted

On 16 July the Committee announced an inquiry into the work of Ofsted and called for written evidence ahead of a one-off evidence session on the work of Ofsted with Sir Michael Wilshaw, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, which was held on Wednesday 16 September.

Responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Education

The Education Committee announced the inquiry on 7 September 2015, and held a single evidence session with Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP, Secretary of State, on the responsibilities of the Secretary of State, on 9 September.

The work of Ofqual

The Committee held a one-off evidence session on 14 October on the work of Ofqual; evidence was given by Glenys Stacey, Chief Regulator and Chief Executive, and Amanda Spielman, Chair, Ofqual.

For the most recent information on all Inquiries and to view evidence please visit

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee>

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 are: Rushanara Ali (Labour, Bethnal Green and Bow), Tom Blenkinsop (Labour, Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland), Rt Hon Alistair Carmichael (Liberal Democrats, Orkney and Shetland); Glyn Davies (Conservative, Montgomeryshire); James Heapey (Conservative, Wells); 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).

CURRENT INQUIRIES

Ofgem annual report and accounts 2014-15

The Energy and Climate Change Committee announced an inquiry into annual report and accounts for Ofgem and held a single oral evidence session on 27 October.

Responsibilities of the Oil and Gas Authority

On 29 October 2015 the Energy and Climate Change Committee announced an inquiry examining how the Oil and Gas Authority plan to fulfil their objectives. An oral evidence session was held on 3 November.

DECC Annual Report and Accounts 2014-15

On 5 November the Committee announced an inquiry into Department of Energy and Climate Change's Annual Report and Accounts for 2014-15; an oral evidence session was held with the Secretary of State and officials from the Department on 10 November.

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. Following a stakeholder forum, held at Westminster on 8 September, the Committee has set up the following three Inquiries:

Investor confidence in the UK energy sector

The inquiry was announced on 16 September. The Committee wants to investigate the factors that contribute to investor confidence in the energy sector and to build an understanding of how DECC's policy making process might impact on investor decisions. An oral evidence session was held on 20 October with Andrea Leasom MP, Minister of State, and officials from the department. Further oral evidence sessions are expected.

Home energy efficiency and demand reduction

On 16 September 2015 the Committee announced an inquiry into previous energy efficiency schemes. Oral evidence sessions were held on 3 and 17 November; further sessions are expected.

Low carbon network infrastructure

On 17 September the Energy and Climate Change Committee announced an inquiry into the UK's electricity infrastructure. The Committee will be investigating what changes are required from today's electricity infrastructure to build a low carbon, flexible and fair network.

Security of supply

On 12 November the Committee announced an inquiry into the security of the UK's energy supply; a one-off evidence session was held on 24 November.

For the most recent information on all Inquiries and to view evidence please visit

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/energy-and-climate-change-committee>

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 are: 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); Angela Smith (Labour, Penistone and Stocksbridge); Rishi Sunak (Conservative, Richmond).

CURRENT INQUIRIES

Greyhound welfare

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee announced an inquiry into the welfare of greyhounds used for racing on 22 September.

Air quality

On 22 October the Committee announced an inquiry into Defra's role at tackling air quality. The Department is currently consulting on how the UK can meet EU Directive requirements for limiting emissions of nitrogen dioxide; it also has a wider role in tackling the harmful levels of many other pollutants emitted by the transport, energy and industrial sectors as well as from households and farming.

Defra's performance in 2014-15

This inquiry was announced on 18 September 2015. The Committee held two oral evidence sessions on 14 and 21 October with Ministers and officials from the Department.

Common Agricultural Policy

On 10 September the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee announced an inquiry looking at developments in the Common Agricultural Policy. The Committee intends to keep a watching brief over developments in the Common Agricultural Policy throughout the life of this Parliament, with a view towards contributing policy ideas ahead of negotiation for the 2020 CAP reform. The intention is to take evidence and report on individual aspects of the policy as they emerge. The Committee would welcome communications on any aspect of the CAP at any time. The Committee took oral evidence on 16 September from Mark Grimshaw, Chief Executive, Rural Payments Agency.

Farmgate prices

On 17 September the Committee announced an inquiry into falling dairy and meat prices. Changing global markets and national conditions have made prices volatile. Policies of EU, UK Government, and individual retailers and processors have a significant impact on prices paid, while consumer choices also shape markets. The Committee wishes to inquire into the impact of these and other factors on farmgate prices, and measures that could be taken to improve prospects for the agriculture industry. Oral evidence sessions were held on 28 October and 4 November.

For the most recent information on all Inquiries and to view evidence please visit

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee>

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 are: Peter Aldous (Conservative, Waveney); Caroline Ansell (Conservative, Eastbourne); Jo Churchill (Conservative, Bury St Edmunds); Mary Creagh (Labour, Wakefield); Geraint Davies (Labour, Swansea West); 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); John Mc Nally (Scottish National Party, Falkirk); Rebecca Pow (Conservative, Taunton Deane); Rory Stewart (Conservative, Penrith and The Border).

CURRENT INQUIRIES

Diesel emissions and air quality

The Environmental Audit Committee is holding an inquiry (announced on 15 October) into diesel emissions from vehicles and its impact on air quality in the UK. In particular, the Committee will examine the accuracy of diesel vehicle emission data. It will also explore whether new questions about the accuracy of this data will impact the Government's policy on air quality and road transport. Oral evidence sessions were held on 15 and 27 October.

Assessment of EU/UK environmental policy

The Environmental Audit Committee is holding an inquiry, announced on 19 October, to assess the extent to which EU environmental objectives and policies have succeeded in tackling environmental issues in the UK. The inquiry will first look at the merits and drawbacks of determining environmental policy at an EU level for the UK and, secondly, look at the implications of such policies on the UK environment.

Future of the Green Investment Bank

On 15 October the Environmental Audit Committee announced an inquiry into the Future of the Green Investment Bank, which the Government plans to move into private ownership. This move is welcomed by the Green Investment Bank, which argues that capital from the Government will not be sufficient to sustain its level of future investment, but some green groups and think tanks have been critical of the plan, warning that it will undermine the GIB's ability to meet its goals and that it will damage confidence in low-carbon sector investment more generally. The Committee held an oral evidence session on 28 October.

The Government's approach to sustainable development

The Environmental Audit Committee launched its inquiry into the Government's approach to sustainable development on 21 July. 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 evidence received for this inquiry will feed into the Committee's work over the course of this Parliament.

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. Oral evidence sessions were held on 14 October and 4 November.

For the most recent information on all Inquiries and to view evidence please visit

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee>

Contact: Environmental Audit Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. Telephone: 020 7219 6150; Email: eacom@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 are: Mr Ben Bradshaw (Labour, Exeter); Julie Cooper (Labour, Burnley); Dr James Davies (Conservative, Vale of Clwyd); Andrea Jenkyns (Conservative, Morley and Outwood); Andrew Percy (Conservative, Brigg and Goole); Emma Reynolds (Labour, Wolverhampton South East); Paula Sherriff (Labour, Dewsbury); Maggie Throup (Conservative, Erewash); Helen Whately (Conservative, Faversham and Mid Kent); Dr Philippa Whitford (Scottish National Party, Central Ayrshire).

CURRENT INQUIRIES

Childhood Obesity

The Health Committee announced a short inquiry on 25 September, building on the previous Committee's work on the impact of diet and physical activity on health. This inquiry specifically considers what the Government's policy priorities should be for addressing childhood obesity. The Committee is not seeking formal written evidence, but has held oral evidence sessions.

Public health post-2013 – structures, organisation, funding and delivery

The Health Committee announced on 27 October a short overview inquiry on the impact of the Health and Social Care Act reforms of the public health landscape, considering whether they have achieved their aims, and what further improvements may be necessary.

Work of the Secretary of State for Health

This inquiry is now concluded.

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. Further oral evidence sessions are expected.

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. Oral evidence sessions were held on 5 and 10 November.

For the most recent information on all Inquiries and to view evidence please visit

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/health-committee>

Contact: Health Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA Telephone: 020 7219 6182; Email: healthcom@parliament.uk

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

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 are: Victoria Borwick (Conservative, Kensington); Stella Creasy (Labour, Walthamstow); Jim Dowd (Labour, Lewisham West and Penge); Chris Green (Conservative, Bolton West); Dr Tania Mathias (Conservative, Twickenham); Carol Monaghan (Scottish National Party, Glasgow North West); Graham Stringer (Labour, Blackley and Broughton); Derek Thomas (Conservative, St Ives); Valerie Vaz (Labour, Walsall South); Matt Warman (Conservative, Boston and Skegness).

CURRENT INQUIRIES

The Science Budget

On 10 July the Committee announced an inquiry into the Science Budget, ahead of the Spending Review. 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 Committee held three further oral evidence sessions on 8 and 15 September and 13 October.

On 9 November the Committee published its report in which it warned that the UK is falling behind its competitors in research and development (R&D) investment and the Government will be putting competitiveness, productivity and jobs at risk if it does not set out a clear roadmap to increase science funding in the Spending Review.

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 Committee held an oral evidence session on 20 October to examine the UK's preparedness and response to disease emergencies, with a particular focus on the provision of expert advice to Government during a disease outbreak. It will also take evidence on the development of an Ebola vaccine and consider some of the challenges of conducting clinical research during a disease outbreak.

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. Oral Evidence sessions were held on 27 October and 17 November.

Investigatory Powers Bill: technology issues

On 4 November 2015 the Science and Technology Committee announced an inquiry into the technology issues of the Investigatory Powers Bill. The Bill is a response to advances in communications, particularly over the internet. Confidence in commerce depends on reliable encryption. The boundaries between content and communications data are becoming blurred. The consequences for privacy, proportionality and data security will be explored by the Committee in the context of the rapidly changing technological landscape – and the need to fight terrorism and crime. An oral evidence session was held on 10 November; a further oral evidence session will be held in December.

For the most recent information on all Inquiries and to view evidence please visit

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee>

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 are: Robert Flello (Labour, Stoke-on-Trent South); Mary Glendon (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).

CURRENT INQUIRIES

Road haulage

The Transport Committee announced the inquiry on 11 September 2015. The Committee is investigating what action the Government has taken to address industry concerns about a lack of skilled drivers in the road haulage sector, and assess how effective the Government's response has been.

Volkswagen Group emissions violations

On 7 October the Transport Committee announced an inquiry into Volkswagen Group emissions violations and held a one-off evidence session on 12 October.

Vehicle Type Approval

On 16 November the Transport Select Committee launched an inquiry to examine whether the vehicle type approval testing is fit for purpose.

Operation Stack

On 7 October the Transport Committee announced an inquiry into Operation Stack, and on 14 October held a one-off evidence session to question freight industry representatives about the efficacy of Operation Stack.

Maritime Policy and Coastguard Modernisation

Following its announcement of the inquiry on 2 September, the Transport Committee held a single evidence session on 7 September, giving members of the committee an opportunity to question Department for Transport ministers and officials about the recommendations of the maritime study group (published on the morning of the evidence session), the future coastguard programme and related maritime issues.

Road traffic law enforcement

The Transport Committee is conducting an inquiry (announced on 10 September) into road traffic law enforcement. The objective of this inquiry is to scrutinise how effectively the Government's policies to improve road safety – by tackling dangerous or careless driving – are being enforced. An oral evidence session was held on 2 November.

Surface transport to airports

On 11 September the Transport Committee announced an inquiry into surface transport at airports. The Committee is interested to assess the effectiveness of the Government's approach to planning surface access to airports, as well as understanding whether the Government is making full use of its powers to influence the selection of infrastructure and accompanying modes of transport to and from airports. Oral evidence sessions were held on 26 October, 9 and 16 November.

For full details of all Inquiries and transcripts of evidence sessions please visit <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/transport-committee>

Contact: Transport Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA Telephone: 020 7219 3266; Email: transcom@parliament.uk; Twitter: @CommonsTrans



PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (POST)



RECENT POST PUBLICATIONS

Herbicide Resistance

August 2015

POSTnote 501

Increasing resistance to herbicides, coupled with a lack of new types of herbicides, has the potential to reduce crop yields. The UK Government's commitment to increase yields over the next 25 years requires the development of alternative crop protection methods. This POSTnote outlines the challenges of herbicide resistance and reviews possible approaches to long-term weed control strategies.

Securing UK Soil Health

August 2015

POSTnote 502

2015 is the United Nations International Year of Soils. Soils underpin food production and regulate water, carbon and nitrogen cycles but are subject to pressures from population growth and climate change. In England & Wales, soil degradation costs around £1bn per year. This POSTnote outlines the evidence for measures that sustain soils and existing policies affecting soil health.

Trends in Energy

September 2015

POSTnote 503

Providing affordable, reliable and sustainable energy is a key issue in UK policy. Energy policy can be informed by current energy sector trends and projections into the future. This briefing outlines key trends in energy, the factors driving these changes and future projections. It also highlights the implications and challenges of these trends.

The 100,000 Genomes Project

September 2015

POSTnote 504

In 2012, the Prime Minister announced plans to sequence 100,000 genomes. The project aims to establish a genomic medicine service within the NHS and support the Government strategy for UK Life Sciences. This POSTnote provides an introduction to genomic medicine and an overview of the aims, structure and major challenges of the 100,000 Genomes Project.

Precision Farming

June 2015

POSTnote 505

Precision farming uses technology to improve efficiency. It offers benefits for yields, profits and the environment. However, uptake by farmers has been slow. This POSTnote describes

precision farming methods, adoption and factors influencing it, and future practices.

Trends in Compulsory Education

September 2015

POSTnote 506

Five trends can be identified in compulsory education across the UK: changes in the attainment gap between different pupil groups, rising pupil numbers, decreasing numbers of people entering initial teacher training, the growing use of technology and changing levels of school autonomy and diversity. Three factors are shaping these trends: population growth, inequality and the changing labour market.

Trends in Crime and Criminal Justice

September 2015

POSTnote 507

Behaviours are criminalised through legislation or judicial decision, and this is influenced by public attitudes. Crime is widely considered to be falling but the data underpinning this trend are complex. This POSTnote describes crime patterns, and highlights issues with crime measurement and data. It also identifies key developments in the criminal justice system.

Deep Sea Mining

September 2015

POSTnote 508

In March 2013, the Prime Minister said that deep-sea mining could be worth £40bn to the UK over the next 30 years. This briefing summarises the framework governing activity in international waters. It describes the mineral deposit types being considered and the proposed extraction methods, potential environmental effects and mitigation options.

Forensic Language Analysis

September 2015

POSTnote 509

Forensic linguistics and phonetics are sciences that examine text and speech. They have applications in criminal, civil and asylum legal proceedings, and in the private sector (for example, in verifying identity). They are also used in counter-terrorism, intelligence and surveillance. This note examines the scientific validity of procedures and their applications, and explores issues surrounding their use.

Trends in ICT

October 2015

POSTnote 510

This note looks at developments in information and communication technology (ICT) and their relevance for UK policy in the next five years. It

examines the capability, use and economic impact of ICT; technical barriers; and implications for cybersecurity, privacy and internet governance.

Automation in Military Operations

October 2015

POSTnote 511

Automated technology is increasingly used in military activities such as intelligence gathering, navigation and weapons delivery. This POSTnote examines current and future military applications of automation, and considers associated legal, ethical and societal issues.

Unintentional Bias in Court

October 2015

POSTnote 512

When asked to interpret information and draw conclusions, people are prone to a number of well understood, unintentional errors in reasoning. These are known as cognitive biases. This POSTnote examines how these affect reasoning and decision-making, and outlines strategies to minimise their influence in court.

Future of Natural Gas

November 2015

POSTnote 513

UK shale gas exploration and efforts to mitigate climate change have stimulated debate about the future of the natural gas sector. This briefing looks at potential pathways for the sourcing and use of natural gas in the UK. It considers the implications for the economy, energy prices, the reliability of energy supplies and efforts to cut emissions.

CURRENT WORK

Biological Sciences – Anti-Ebola Treatments, Intellectual Property and Plants, Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Guidelines, Global Health Inequality, Electronic Health Records

Environment and Energy – Managing the UK Plutonium Stockpile, Trends in the Environment, Trends in Agriculture, the Water-Food-Energy Nexus, the Circular Economy, Marine Microplastic Pollution, Adapting Urban Drainage, Natural and Health, Putting a Value on Nature

Physical sciences and IT – Digital Forensics, Financial Technologies, Trends in Defence

Social Sciences – Preventing extremism, Policing Domestic Abuse

CONFERENCES AND SEMINARS

Evidence Roundtable

The use of evidence in Parliament fulfils many roles and is particularly important to facilitate Parliament's ability to scrutinise the work of government effectively. In this context, 'evidence' in the sense of information presented in support of an assertion and to guide decision making can take a variety of formats, from academic research, written submissions to Select Committee Inquiries, oral evidence, the perspectives of other Members and the media, and for the Commons, information about Members' constituencies and from their constituents. It is important that Parliament contributes to the debate to ensure that the diverse understandings of 'evidence' in Parliament are understood both internally and externally. This roundtable explored the relationship between different types of evidence and information needs, to explore what types of evidence are most appropriate to these different requirements, and to consider how to assess quality and rigour of each evidence type in these contexts. A secondary aim was to contribute to the wider

public debate around the relationship between evidence and policy, to ensure that the particular context of Parliament is taken into account. The roundtable involved 20 experts from a range of disciplines that are able to outline approaches taken in different contexts and to stimulate discussion as well as internal staff from across both Houses.

Air Quality

This briefing provided the opportunity for parliamentarians to discuss with experts the effect of air quality policies on air pollutant exposure and health. The event was chaired by Baroness Manningham-Buller. This was a working breakfast for MPs, Peers and their staff to discuss the science and resulting policy issues relating to new knowledge on the interconnections and pathways between air pollutants and interacting stressors, exposure routes and health effects in humans. The speakers were Professor Paul Wilkinson, Public and Environmental Health Research Unit, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, member of the Committee on the Medical effects of Air Pollution (COMEAP); Professor Martin Williams, Environmental Research Group, King's College London; Professor Michael Depledge, Chair of Environment and Human Health, University of Exeter, and Chair of the Board of the European Centre for Environment and Human Health; Dr Sotiris Vardoulakis, Air Pollution & Climate Change Group, Public Health England; Professor Ian Boyd, Chief Scientific Adviser, Defra; Andrea Lee, Health and Environment Adviser, Client Earth; Ruth Calderwood, Environmental Policy Officer at City of London.

Research and Parliament

Research is one type of evidence that can strengthen Parliament's important democratic functions – debating the issues of the day, creating and revising laws, and examining and critiquing the actions of government. The purpose of this event was to inform academics about the many ways that they can improve their impact on Parliament. It presented findings from an analysis into the impact case studies submitted as part of the recent HEFCE Research Excellence Framework (REF) to showcase the different ways that academics (from all disciplines) have contributed to Parliamentary processes. It drew out lessons for Parliament on how it is currently engaging with academics, and how it might in the future. This reception gave attendees the opportunity to speak to researchers, Parliamentarians, Parliamentary staff and other relevant stakeholders about their experiences in an informal setting. Speakers included the Rt Hon John Bercow MP, Speaker of the House of Commons; Baroness D'Souza, The Lord Speaker; Professor Jane Elliott, Chief Executive, Economic and Social Research Council; Professor James Wilsdon, Chair of the Campaign for Social Science, Professor of Science & Democracy, University of Sussex; and Penny Young, Librarian and Director General of Information Services, House of Commons. The event was sponsored by Research Councils UK and held in collaboration with the Parliaments and Legislatures Specialist Group of the Political Studies Association.

STAFF, FELLOWS AND INTERNS AT POST

Fellows

Kirsten Miller, Natural History Museum, British Ecological Society
Charlotte Wood, Institute of Zoology, Natural Environment Research Council

Madeline Burke, Bristol University, Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, was placed with the House of Commons Library Science and Environment Section

Louise Wilson, Surrey University, Biotechnology and Biological

Sciences Research Council
Jenny Crane, Warwick University, Wellcome Medical History and Humanities
Genevieve Waterhouse, London Southbank University, British Psychology Society
Kathryn Boast, Oxford University, Science and Technology Facilities Council
Sarah Smith, Reading University, Institute of Food Science and Technology
Stephen Barrie, King's College London, Nuffield Bioethics

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

EPTA Directors Meeting, Paris, September 2015

Ran workshop with EPTA directors about POST's project to use Trends Cards to facilitate work on futures. Attended conference on Climate Change and Innovation.

Mexico, November 2015

Aaron Goater, the energy adviser for POST, spent a week in Mexico to help set up a parliamentary advice service for the Mexican Parliament.



HOUSE OF LORDS SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY SELECT COMMITTEE

The members of the Committee are: 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 9 oral evidence sessions were conducted. The Committee will report by 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 was issued in September. Oral evidence sessions commenced in mid-December and will continue in the first quarter of 2016.

Government Chief Scientific Adviser

A public, oral evidence session with Sir Mark Walport was held on 17 November 2015.

The Dowling Review

On 7 July 2015, the Committee held a one-off public, 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.

Nuclear Fusion

On 21 July 2015, the Committee held a public, 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 Resilience of the Electricity System

In July 2014, the Committee launched an inquiry into the resilience of electricity infrastructure. 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 was held on 3 November 2015.

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 hlsience@parliament.uk.



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 recently updated briefings are opposite.
For further information contact:
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RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Nuisance Calls: Unsolicited sales and marketing, and silent calls

2.9.15 | *SN*

Nuisance calls cause widespread harm and inconvenience which have been acknowledged by the previous and current Government and the relevant regulators. For the two types of nuisance calls – silent calls and unwanted marketing calls – the Coalition Government first raised the financial penalty available to Ofcom in enforcing its rules on nuisance calls from £50,000 to £2 million in 2010. And second, in 2015, introduced new regulations lowering the legal threshold before the ICO could take action to issue a civil monetary penalty up to £500,000. This note sets out the key regulations which seek to address nuisance calls and the main sources of assistance and their limitations.

The Assisted Dying (No 2) Bill 2015

4.9.15 | *CBP-7292*

Rob Marris MP, after being drawn first in the Private Member's Bill ballot in this Parliament, tabled the Assisted Dying Bill (No 2) 2015 which was defeated at its second reading on 11 September 2015. The Bill is intended to enable competent adults who are terminally ill to be allowed assistance with ending their life if they request it. Previous attempts to change the law in this area included the Assisted Dying Bill 2014, tabled by Lord Falconer in the House of Lords. Lord Falconer has also tabled the Assisted Dying Bill 2015 in this Parliament.

The Government has indicated that it considers this issue to be a matter of individual conscience; it has traditionally been the subject of a free vote.

This paper provides a background to the legal cases in this area and the DPP guidance on prosecutions for assisted suicide. It includes an overview of the Assisted Dying (No 2) Bill 2015, and a summary of the 2014 Assisted Dying Bill's progress in the House of Lords in the last Parliament. A discussion of stakeholder views is included.

Fixed Broadband: Policy, Coverage and Speeds

7.10.15 | *SN06643*

This sets out the current situation with regard to broadband access and coverage and provides an overview of the Government's broadband policy. It focuses on the delivery of broadband targets and funding in England. The devolved administrations have their own delivery programmes.

Psychoactive Substances Bill

3.11.15 | *CBP-7334*

This briefing paper was prepared for the Second Reading of the Psychoactive Substances Bill on 19 October 2015. It provides background to new psychoactive substances, their use, and the current legislative framework, together with an overview of the Bill and its consideration in the Lords. Some response to the Bill from interest groups is discussed.

New psychoactive substances have been a challenge for existing drugs legislation in the UK; they are developed at such a speed that by the time one substance is controlled, another one with a slight change in chemical structure can take its place in the market. There have been some developments to attempt to improve control of these substances, such as temporary class drug orders which allow the 12-month temporary control of a substance.

In 2014, the Home Office appointed an expert panel to look at legislative options to tackle new psychoactive substances. They looked at international examples and recommended that a blanket ban approach, similar to that in place in the Republic of Ireland, would be best. The Government response to the review said that they would take the recommendations forward. The Conservative manifesto prior to the 2015 election included a commitment to make a ban on all new psychoactive substances.

Support for Science

3.11.15 | *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 and protected by a policy ring-fence, is currently £4.6 billion per annum. The Conservative Party Manifesto 2015 provides an outline of the new Government's general policy commitments in this area. A library standard note, Research and Development in the UK, includes, among other things, a regional breakdown of support for science from different sources identified as government, higher education, business and private non-profit organisations (eg charities). On 20 March, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published a statistical bulletin: UK Gross Domestic Expenditure on Research and Development, 2013.

The ONS provides data on R&D expenditure by UK country and region. In this context, the country and region refers to the location where the R&D is performed, not the location of the funder. In 2013, the South East, East of England and London continued to dominate R&D activity in the UK, accounting for 52% of total UK R&D.

The Off-patent Drugs Bill

5.11.15 | CBP-7365

The Off-patent Drugs Bill 2015 is a Private Members' Bill tabled by Nick Thomas-Symonds after he came eighth in the ballot this year. It had its first reading on 24 June and it is expected that the Second Reading debate will be resumed on 4 December 2015.

The Bill addresses the situation where a drug that has an expired patent is discovered to be effective for a new indication that is not within the scope of its licence. It would require the Secretary of State to seek licences for off-patent drugs in new indications, and to request the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to conduct technology appraisals for off-patent drugs in new indications.

Shale Gas and Fracking

5.11.15 | 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.

A report on this was published by DECC in September 2013, in which shale gas emissions were said to be similar to those of conventional gas and lower than those of coal and LNG, leading the Secretary of State to describe shale gas as a 'bridge' to a low-carbon future.

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.

ACTIVITIES

In addition to providing bespoke briefings for MPs, and publishing papers such as those above, the section has prepared debate packs, containing briefing and supporting press and parliamentary material, for debates on: Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (8/9/15); Superfast Broadband Rollout (7/10/15); E-petition relating to making the production, sale and use of cannabis legal (9/10/15); Fire safety measures in schools (20/10/15); Work of the UK in Tackling Malaria and Neglected Tropical Diseases (26/10/15); Green Investment Bank (28/10/15); Role of the Treasury in Supporting UK Science (03/11/15); and the Dog Meat Trade (3/11/15).

Staff of the Section have participated in a wide range of visits and other engagements with academics and other stakeholders to build contact networks and to find out about developments in research. 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.

Elena Ares arranged for Professor Corinne Le Quéré, Professor Andy Jordan and Dr Rachel Warren to come to Parliament to present to House staff on "Beyond 2 degrees: Dangerous climate change – the implications for policy and government". Louise Smith organised a visit to the renewable energy company RES, at their award winning headquarters at Kings Langley in Hertfordshire.

Other stakeholder engagements have included meetings and events with Imperial College, University of London, the Environment Agency, the National Farmers Union, National Grid, for a full day's briefing on the operation of and outlook for the electricity market, University of Exeter, City University, Cambridge Science and Technology Policy Department.

Staff have also supported members of select committees including: presenting at a seminar convened to provide the new Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committees members with an introduction to the policy areas that Defra covers; and participating in an Energy and Climate Change Committee seminar for new members which they had helped to facilitate.