Rt Hon David Willetts MP  
Minister of State for Universities and Science  
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills  
1 Victoria Street  
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Dear David,

In your letter of 9 November you invited the Committee’s views on the further development of the Haldane Principle. The Committee raised the operation of the Haldane Principle when you appeared before us on 24 November and we were grateful for the additional information you provided.

In your and Professor Smith’s evidence to us on 24 November you said that this exercise was not a “major re-interpretation of Haldane” and you confirmed in response to my question that you were not "moving substantially from [...] John Denham’s interpretation", which he set out in a speech in April 2008. This does raise a question about the purpose of what now appears to be a very limited exercise.

Since it was formed, the Committee has not taken evidence on the Haldane Principle and so we are not able at this stage to set out any conclusions. As, however, Graham Stringer pointed out during the evidence session on 24 November, our predecessor committees examined the Haldane Principle and you undertook to review the evidence they took and the views the committees set out in their reports. The two most recent reports were:

- Innovation, Universities, Skills and Science Committee, DIUS’s Departmental Report 2008, Third Report of Session 2008-09; and
In the time available we have had a discussion of the Haldane Principle. At this stage we can set out some issues that may fall within our deliberations when we consider the Haldane Principle and how it has been developed by the Government later in the Parliament. The following issues are of interest and you may wish to consider them when developing your statement:

1. the balance of responsibilities between the Government and the Research Councils, specifically on the clarification of boundaries between strategic oversight by Ministers and Government and the decisions made by Research Councils, for example, in identifying strategic and applied research programmes when, for instance, the Government sets a priority to generate economic benefit from the taxpayer’s investment;

2. the scope for conflict between the Haldane Principle and the Excellence Principle, under which the Research Councils allocate resources, and any priorities set by Government, for example, to foster regional economic development;

3. the transparency of the science budget allocation process as priorities are set. As you will see from the previous reports, one issue our predecessors raised in considering the Haldane Principle was the extent to which Government developed methodologies for identifying areas of high priority; and

4. how the Haldane Principle should protect scientific independence.

Andrew Miller MP
Chair