



# Science and Technology Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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<http://www.parliament.uk/science>

From Stephen Metcalfe MP, Chair

Professor Sir Mark Walport  
Government Chief Scientific Adviser  
Government Office for Science  
1 Victoria Street  
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9 February 2017

Dear Sir Mark,

## **Departmental Chief Scientific Advisers and the GCSA**

Thank you for coming to give oral evidence to the Committee on 25 January on GO Science's annual report for 2015/16.

As part of that session we raised with you the number of vacancies for Departmental Chief Scientific Advisers listed on the gov.uk website. I was pleased to see that this page was updated shortly after the session. The site now distinguishes between 'Vacant' and 'Currently no CSA', with the latter referring to Departments where no such position currently exists and alternative arrangements are in place.

However, despite the updates to the page there still appears to be some confusion. I have appended a table to this letter which summarises the recent changes on gov.uk and compares them with responses I have received to Parliamentary Questions since the evidence session. As you will see, there is a mismatch in the case of the Ministry of Justice and the Northern Ireland Office, despite the recent updates.

I am therefore concerned that GO-Science does not have a comprehensive overview of the CSA arrangements in each Department or that this is properly documented anywhere.

I would suggest, therefore, that further improvements could be made to the clarity and accuracy of the gov.uk pages, and that GO-Science should exercise responsibility for ensuring that the CSA network is robust and that the information available is up-to-date and accurate.

On 11 March 2013, the Science and Technology Committee asked your predecessor Professor Sir John Beddington what his top three achievements were as GCSA. His immediate response was "managing to achieve a network of CSAs now covering every major Department".

On 25 January 2017 your response to us was that ongoing vacancies and the number of Departments where the position does not exist were "not something that [you] can be held accountable for", since "ultimately, it is up to each Department to make their decision about it." Please assure me that Sir John's legacy in this area is being

sustained, despite this apparent shift in emphasis, and that the CSA network is still recognised as a vital way of ensuring scientific advice is available across Government.

That said, it is encouraging that the Department for Exiting the European Union and the Department for International Trade are giving thought to the possibility of appointing their own Chief Scientific Advisers, and my Committee looks forward to hearing the outcomes of these deliberations.

I am also concerned about the length of time it takes for Departments to recruit new CSAs. There is a forthcoming vacancy at the Home Office; the position was advertised with a deadline of 7 December, but an appointment has not yet been made. Similarly, the position of CSA to the Treasury became vacant in November but does not appear to have been advertised yet. It is not clear how long the vacancy at the Ministry of Defence has existed for, and I would be grateful if you could clarify.

Finally, the Government will soon be recruiting for a new GCSA, and I hope that there will be no delay in beginning this process. I also trust that the Government will ensure it recruits from as wide a pool as possible. As I am sure you are aware, BEIS recently had to reissue the advert for UKRI Board Members when it was pointed out that it did not include any reference to diversity. I would be grateful if you could ensure that similar mistakes are not made when it comes to recruiting for your successor as GCSA.

I am copying this letter to Sir Jeremy Heywood as the Cabinet Secretary, and I look forward to your response in due course.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Metcalfe', with a horizontal line underneath it.

**Stephen Metcalfe MP**  
Chair

<b>Department</b>	<b>Gov.uk Jan 17</b>	<b>Gov.uk Feb 17</b>	<b>PQ Written answer</b>
<b>Ministry of Justice</b>	Vacant	Currently no CSA	<i>The Ministry of Justice does not have a vacancy for the post of Chief Scientific Adviser. Osama Rahman, Director of Analysis and Chief Economist, is the Chief Scientific Adviser for the Ministry of Justice.</i>
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	Vacant	Vacant	<i>The Northern Ireland Office does not have a post of Chief Scientific Adviser.</i>
<b>Ministry of Defence</b>	Professor Vernon Gibson	Vacant	
<b>Treasury</b>	Susan Acland-Hood	Vacant	<i>Following the departure of the previous Chief Scientific Adviser to the Treasury in November 2016, the Treasury expects to appoint a new Chief Scientific Adviser in due course.</i>
<b>International Trade</b>	Vacant	Currently no CSA	<i>Officials in the Department for International trade are working with Sir Mark Walport, the Government Chief Scientific Advisor, and the Government Office for Science to provide advice on the specification for any such role.</i>
<b>Home Office</b>	Bernard Silverman	Bernard Silverman	<i>The Home Office is in the process of recruiting a new Chief Scientific Advisor at the moment. A suitable candidate will be appointed as soon as is practicable. As with any recruitment process the timescale for filling the vacancy is dependent upon attracting and selecting a suitable candidate, notice periods, and completion of pre-employment and security checks.</i>
<b>Culture, Media and Sport</b>	Vacant	Currently no CSA	<i>Due to its small size DCMS does not employ a Chief Scientific Adviser, using its Science Advisory Council to ensure officials have access to high level, independent, scientific and technical advice. While there is currently no plan to recruit a CSA this position is regularly reviewed.</i>
<b>Exiting the European Union</b>	Vacant	Currently no CSA	<p>We recently received a letter from Robin Walker MP as follows:</p> <p><i>My Department continues to discuss with Sir Mark Walport [...] what more we should do to ensure that DExEU is accessing the very best scientific expertise. There are several models for achieving this [...] the Department is currently exploring these options, including considering the appointment of a Chief Scientific Adviser.</i></p>