House of Lords Science and Technology Committee

Call for Evidence: Setting science and technology research funding priorities

Cuts in overall public spending due to the current economic climate will lead to some difficult decisions about how to allocate public funds for science and technology research. Effective mechanisms for allocating funds are vital if the UK's science base is to remain healthy both now and in the future and is to continue to contribute to meeting societal needs.

The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, chaired by Lord Sutherland of Houndwood, is undertaking an inquiry into the setting of research funding priorities within Government and other bodies responsible for the allocation of public funds for science and technology research – that is, all aspects of science and technology, including, for example, the medical and engineering sciences.

The Committee intends to focus on:

- how decisions are made to fund research to meet societal needs;
- the balance of funding for targeted[1] versus unsolicited response-mode, curiosity-driven research[2]; and
- how research is commissioned in Government departments and agencies.

The inquiry will cover the research councils, Higher Education Funding Councils (HEFCs) and Government departmental research and development. It will not cover funding for European Union research activities.

The Committee invites evidence on the questions below.

The deadline for written submissions is Friday 25 September 2009.

- What is the overall objective of publicly-funded science and technology research?
- How are public funds for science and technology research allocated? Who is involved at each level and what principles apply? Where appropriate, is the Haldane Principle[3] being upheld?
- Are existing objectives and mechanisms for the allocation of public funds for research appropriate? If not, what changes are necessary?
- What governs the allocation of funding for Government policy-directed research through Government departmental and agency initiatives? Are existing mechanisms appropriate? What is the role of Departmental Chief Scientific Advisers?
- How are science and technology research priorities co-ordinated across Government, and between Government and the relevant funding organisations? Who is responsible for ensuring that research gaps to meet policy needs are filled?
- Is the balance of Government funding for targeted versus response-mode research appropriate? What mechanisms are required to ensure that an

appropriate and flexible balance is achieved? Should the funding of science and technology research be protected within the Research Councils or Government departments? How will the current economic climate change the way that funds are allocated in the future?

- How is publicly-funded science and technology research aligned and co-ordinated with non-publicly funded research (for example, industrial and charitable research collaborations)? How can industry be encouraged to participate in research efforts seeking to answer societal needs?
- To what extent should publicly-funded science and technology research be focused on areas of potential economic importance? How should these areas be identified?
- How does the UK's science and technology research funding strategy and spend compare with that in other countries and what lessons can be learned? In this regard, how does England compare with the devolved administrations?

Submissions are not required to cover all questions. The Committee would also be interested to hear about any other issues not already covered by this call for evidence that are relevant to the scope of the inquiry.

For **further information on the inquiry** please contact Christine Salmon Percival, Clerk, either by telephone: 020 7219 6072 or email: salmonc@parliament.uk

The Committee will hold public meetings from Autumn 2009, and the Committee's report will be published in the Spring of 2010.

Submissions should be sent to:

Christine Salmon Percival
Clerk of Science and Technology Committee
House of Lords
London SW1A 0PW

and preferably by email (as a Word document) to: salmonc@parliament.uk

Please ensure that you include relevant contact details. Evidence should be attributed and dated, with a note of your name and position, and should state whether it is submitted on an individual or corporate basis.

Short submissions are preferred; longer submissions (more than 6 pages) should include a summary. Hard copy should be clearly printed or typed on single sides of A4 paper, unstapled. Paragraphs should be numbered.

Evidence should be prepared specifically for this inquiry. Witnesses are encouraged to focus on those issues of which they have particular knowledge or experience—**submissions are not required to cover all questions**.

Evidence becomes the property of the Committee, and may be printed, published electronically or circulated by the Committee at any stage. If your evidence is not

printed, it will in due course be made available to the public in the Parliamentary Archives.

You may in addition publicise or publish your evidence yourself, but in doing so you should indicate that it was prepared for the Committee. If a submission is substantially the same as work that has already been published or disseminated for some other purpose, or is deemed not to be relevant to the inquiry, it will not be treated as formal evidence.

Personal contact details supplied to the Committee will be removed from evidence before publication and from the copy deposited in the Archives. However, personal contact details will be retained by the Committee Office and used for specific purposes relating to the Committee's work, for instance to seek additional information or to send copies of the Committee's Report.

The Committee will invite some of those who submit written evidence to give oral evidence at Westminster. Transcripts of such evidence will be published.

You can follow the progress of the inquiry via the Science and Technology Committee web pages, accessed from http://www.parliament.uk/hlscience.

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[1] "Targeted research" refers to research directed towards a specific strategic outcome and includes, for example, Government departmental research and the research councils' 'themed' research programmes.

[2] The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), for example, uses the following definition of responsive-mode research: "the funding stream that supports excellent research in response to unsolicited ideas from research groups, consortia or individuals, in any area relevant to NERC's remit. NERC promotes unrestricted and innovative thinking; proposed research can be pure, applied or policy-driven, and must seek to address - or provide the means to address - clearly defined science questions."

[3] After the First World War, Lord Haldane undertook a review of the function of Government. The 'Haldane Principle' stems from a distinction made in that review between 'research work of general use' and 'research work supervised by administrative departments', advising that the former should be undertaken independently of administrative supervision as 'science ignores departmental as well as geographical boundaries'. The 'Haldane Principle' has evolved over time, and there is currently no accepted definition of the principle.