

# Science and Technology Committee

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From Andrew Miller MP, Chair

The Rt Hon Francis Maude MP  
Minister for the Cabinet Office  
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13 January 2015

*Dear Francis,*

I am writing to you in your capacity as Minister for the Cabinet Office to express some concerns that my Committee and I have regarding the status and recruitment of departmental Chief Scientific Advisers (CSAs).

The role of a departmental CSA is an extremely important and demanding one: in the Government's own words, these individuals exist to ensure that "robust, joined-up evidence is at the core of decisions within departments and across government". Over the course of this Parliament we have become worried that this crucial role is not being given the respect that it deserves and is becoming increasingly diluted. There are several issues that have built up over the period of this Parliament to give us increasing concerns:

- Departments are frequently subject to long periods without a CSA, presumably because of poor succession planning or a lack of recognition of the importance of the role. For example, the Department for Transport post has been vacant since May 2014 and has only very recently been advertised. This concern has also been highlighted by the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, which cited "extended vacancies in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and Department for Transport" as one of the drivers for its 2012 inquiry into the role and function of departmental CSAs.
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport continues to resist appointing a Chief Scientific Adviser, despite this having been recommended by numerous experts and committees. The recent decision to appoint an internal Principal Scientific Officer does not, in our view, negate the need for independent scrutiny in the form of an appropriately qualified CSA.
- We acknowledged, in 2011, the long overdue appointment of someone to the role of CSA in the Treasury but, even at the time and with no disrespect to Dr Richardson, it was apparent that the appointment was a nod in the direction of having someone in post rather than a serious attempt to bring

independent scientific advice to the department. While it is not breaking a rule to have a senior civil servant fill the role, it does not smack of an appetite for the independent advice and challenge people expect of a chief scientific adviser.

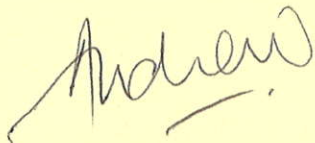
- In my role as Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, I come into contact with many serving CSAs, some of whom are coming to the end of their tenure. My conversations with those and others "in the know" do not fill me with confidence that the expertise and experience currently available to Ministers will be continued in the future.
- Most recently we looked at the role of the Education CSA. Our concerns about the current time commitment to this role and the manner of appointment were sharp enough that we felt the need to write to the Secretary of State for Education. Dr Leunig's role as CSA receives, on average one day per week, less than half what a CSA would usually dedicate to the task. The position was never advertised as a standalone role just an additional task for the best Chief Analyst recruited by the department (an actual tick box appointment) and his previous role as a senior ministerial policy adviser would cast doubt on his ability to provide truly independent challenge and advice.

The response to our letter from Chris Wormald, Permanent Secretary to the Department for Education largely brushed aside our concerns, not on the basis of sound evidence demonstrating that they were unjustified, but through a simple and repeated avowal that the Department was "satisfied" with the current situation. We, on the other hand, are not.

The Science and Innovation Strategy published by the Government less than a month ago recognised that "there are many areas where science impinges on government policy" and that "the best policymaking requires the best analysis and evidence". Departmental chief scientific advisers are vital cogs in the machinery responsible for delivering this goal. I hope that you will demonstrate your commitment to evidence-based policy making by taking steps to resolve the issues that we have highlighted in this letter at the earliest possible opportunity.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Miller". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

**Andrew Miller**  
*Chair*