



Science and Technology Committee

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From Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP, Chair

The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee
2019 Parliament

31 October 2019

To the 2019 Parliament Science and Technology Committee,

The work of the Science and Technology Committee

I am writing an open letter to you as the outgoing Chair of the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, on behalf of the 2017 Parliament S&T Committee.

There were a number of areas where we had either publicly undertaken to do work, or where we had plans to undertake follow-up work on inquiries from earlier in the Parliament. However, due to the early Parliamentary General Election we have not been able to complete this work. We therefore wanted to set this out to you so that you can consider taking this forward when the Committee is re-established after the 2019 election.

Work we had publicly committed to undertake

Earlier this year we agreed to pursue three inquiries as part of the 'My Science Inquiry' process, an initiative started under my predecessor Stephen Metcalfe, of inviting members of the public and organisations to propose future inquiries to the Committee. We have made progress on all of the three inquiries, but we have not completed any:

- Commercial Genomics: we have held two evidence sessions so far as part of this inquiry and publicly written to the Department of Health and Social Care with some initial issues that have arisen in the inquiry. We had been hoping to hold a further two evidence sessions as part of this inquiry as well as an engagement event before producing a substantive Report on the issue.
- The impact of science funding policy on equality, diversity, inclusion and accessibility: this was a proposal supported by over 200 individuals and the secretariat has been working closely with the presenter of this idea to shape the inquiry. We sought an initial set of data and information from UKRI to inform the shape of the evidence gathering stage of our proposed inquiry. We have received a response from UKRI. The response from UKRI is published on our website.
- The role of science and technology in addressing challenges to food security and biodiversity: we had not launched this inquiry but formally agreed on 29 October to launch it and had agreed terms of reference. We worked with the academic and the organisation who proposed the inquiry to agree our terms of reference. We did not put the terms of reference into the public domain owing to the early Parliamentary General Election.

Work we had hoped to undertake

There were a number of areas where we had planned to undertake further work:

- Clinical trials transparency: the Committee held a one-off evidence session on 29 October to explore the progress that had been made with the reporting of clinical trials results. We heard from universities and NHS trusts who had made progress with

reporting their results over the course of this year, as well as those who had not made sufficient progress. We also heard from regulators on the work they had undertaken in this area. We were hoping to hold another follow-up session with the European Medicines Agency, regarding their responsibilities and actions. We know the consequences of non-compliance with reporting requirements: wasted money and research, publication bias and risks to human health. We have published the responses we've received from letters I sent to NHS Trusts and universities earlier this year. The Committee's work has led to a real momentum in this area but there is a risk of this diminishing if scrutiny of relevant bodies and organisations is not maintained. This is particularly crucial as the Health Research Authority's new Research Transparency Strategy (as recommended by the Committee) is expected in early 2020 and will require further scrutiny from the Committee.

- Evidence-based early years intervention: our initial inquiry on this subject made clear the opportunity for successful implementation of evidence-based early years intervention to positively transform people's lives, as well as to reduce long-term costs to Government. We identified examples of early intervention working well around the country, but also the challenges that local authorities and their partners face in delivering effective, evidence-based early interventions. Given the fragmented provision, the Committee called for a new national strategy to be drawn up. The Committee was not satisfied with the initial Government response and therefore decided to ask for a further response from the cross-Government ministerial working group on family support from conception to the age of two. This Response has not yet been received. We also planned to have an evidence session together with the Health and Social Care Committee with Ministers from DHSC, MHCLG and DfE to enquire about the recommendations of the ministerial group and the Government's intended follow-up actions, as well as to pursue issues raised in our Report further. I have also written publicly to all departments represented on the cross-Government working group raising key policy issues.

We had also formally agreed to undertake a one-off evidence session on the encryption of messages on social media platforms.

There were many other areas we had informally agreed to undertake follow-up work in the coming year, but we have now been unable to do so. I hope that you might be able to take up some or all of this work in the new Parliament. I wish you all the very best on the Science and Technology Committee.

Yours,



Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP
Chair

Enjoy !!