

SCIENCE IN PARLIAMENT

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The Journal of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee.

The Committee is an Associate Parliamentary Group of members of both Houses of Parliament and British members of the European Parliament, representatives of scientific and technical institutions, industrial organisations and universities.



Science in Parliament has two main objectives:

1. to inform the scientific and industrial communities of activities within Parliament of a scientific nature and of the progress of relevant legislation;
2. to keep Members of Parliament abreast of scientific affairs.



Dr Brian Iddon MP
Chairman,
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Science in Parliament

There are 75 Advisory Bodies to Government in the STEM policy area. So, it was a very rare event when Secretary of State Alan Johnson asked Professor David Nutt to resign as Chairman of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD), an event that has caused a lot of debate. The Government has set out its principles for engagement between Government and those that provide independent advice. However, it is reserving the right to take advice into consideration but to ignore it if political considerations override that advice. Not all will agree.

The Department of Business, Innovation and Skills published its more detailed proposals for the allocation of funding under the new Research Excellence Framework (REF, which replaces the RAE) last September, and has proposed weightings of 60% for outputs, 25% for impact and 15% for environment. The academic community has reacted strongly against these proposals, with 17,570 signatures being collected for an online petition in just seven weeks. The first REF exercise is due to be completed in 2013.

The controversy about REF comes at a time when the Government is seeking reductions in the science budget and countries such as the USA and Germany are increasing theirs. Efficiency savings of £180 million in the 2009 budget for Higher Education Institutions have been called for, with a further cut in their budget of 6.6% for the 2010-11 financial year – representing a reduction of £88 million for teaching and research. £600 million of reductions in the HEI budget were announced in the Pre-Budget report by 2013. The Government is still maintaining that STEM budgets will be protected. However, HEIs are independent organisations, and cuts in STEM subjects can result in the largest savings for Vice-Chancellors, as we have seen in the past. The HoC Science & Technology Select Committee has launched an inquiry as a result of these announcements.

As if there are not enough controversies around, the work of the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia came under fire as a result of leaked e-mails immediately prior to the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.

Congratulations go to the Government on its creation of the UK Space Agency.

The Russian discovery of element 114, ununquadium (Uuq), has been confirmed by a team at the University of California at Berkeley.

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