

The Government's response to the Science and Technology Committee's report on the policy and organisation of the Office of Science and Technology : first special report / Science and Technology Committee.

Contributors

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
COMMITTEE

First Special Report

**The Government's response to the Science and
Technology Committee's Report on
the Policy and Organisation
of the Office of
Science and Technology**

*Ordered by The House of Commons to be printed
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The Science and Technology Committee is appointed under SO No. 130 to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Office of Science and Technology, associated public bodies and similar matters within the responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The Committee consists of a maximum of eleven members, of whom the quorum is three. Unless the House otherwise orders, all Members nominated to the Committee continue to be members of it for the remainder of the Parliament.

The Committee has power:

- (a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place, and to report from time to time;
- (b) to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the Committee's order of reference;
- (c) to communicate to any other such committee and to the Committee of Public Accounts its evidence and any other documents relating to matters of common interest; and
- (d) to meet concurrently with any other such committee for the purposes of deliberating, taking evidence, or considering draft reports.

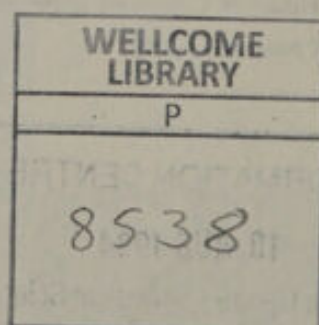
The following were nominated members of the Committee on 13 July 1992:

Mr Spencer Batiste	Sir Giles Shaw
Dr Jeremy Bray	Sir Trevor Skeet
Mr Malcolm Bruce	Dr Gavin Strang
Mrs Anne Campbell	Sir Gerard Vaughan
Cheryl Gillan	Dr Alan W Williams
Mr William Powell	

Sir Giles Shaw was elected Chairman on 15 July 1992.

On 9 November 1992 Mr Malcolm Bruce was discharged and Mr Andrew Miller added to the Committee.

On 16 November 1992 Dr Gavin Strang was discharged and Dr Lynne Jones added to the Committee.



FIRST SPECIAL REPORT

The Science and Technology Committee has agreed to the following Special Report:

We have received the following letter from the Office of Science and Technology, commenting on the First Report from the Science and Technology Committee, Session 1992-93, on the Policy and Organisation of the Office of Science and Technology:

SUPPLEMENTARY GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE'S FIRST REPORT OF SESSION 1992-93 ON THE POLICY AND ORGANISATION OF THE OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY¹

Letter to the Clerk of the Committee from Mr Philip Dale, Office of Science and Technology (12 October 1993)

Thank you for your letter of 7 July to Eleanor Linton setting out some points on which the Committee would like a fuller reply to its First Report on "The Policy and Organisation of the Office of Science and Technology" than that contained in the White Paper. I am sorry that it has not been possible to reply sooner. Taking each of your questions in turn, we would offer the following advice:

1. *Are there circumstances in which the Accounting Officer's role of the Permanent Secretary could extend to the determination and distribution of the science budget?*

The Permanent Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (OPSS) is responsible for advising on all aspects of the work of the Office including science policy issues of the kind addressed in the recent White Paper and the strategy for the science budget. He works closely with the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA), with Sir David Phillips and with other staff in the Office of Science and Technology (OST). As OPSS Accounting Officer he has to assure himself that appropriate systems are in place, at all levels, to ensure satisfactory allocation and use of the Science Budget. At the highest level, it is for the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to decide on the distribution of the Science Budget to the Research Councils and to other funded bodies. In this his prime advisers will be the Permanent Secretary, OPSS, the CSA and the Director General for the Research Councils (DGRC) who will be assisted by a standing Expert Group. It will be for the DGRC to advise the OPSS Accounting Officer on whether the Research Councils' own controls conform with the requirements of both propriety and good financial management.

The DGRC will also be responsible for working with the Heads of the Research Councils on science policy issues relating to the Research Councils, and on these he will report to the Chancellor of the Duchy. On questions of scientific priorities he will work closely with the CSA, and will also be a member of the Science and Engineering Base Co-ordinating Committee, which is chaired by the CSA.

2. *What consultations, if any, are taking place on intellectual property rights?*

The existence of a "grace period", for the filing of patents after publication, is currently under negotiation at an international level, as part of an intellectual property rights harmonisation package. It seems likely that the rest of the world will come into line with the US system. It is expected that a diplomatic conference will be organised in the first half of 1994 at which this question will be resolved.

3. *What input, if any, will OST have into the preparation of "concordats" between the Research Councils and their departmental customers?*

The Concordats will be primarily for discussion and agreement between the relevant Department and Research Council. We will, however, expect OST to have a role in encouraging and monitoring progress, and in ensuring that Councils and Departments are able to learn from each other's experience and follow common models where these are appropriate.

4. *What will be the difference between the CST and ACOST, apart from the Chairmanship?*

The new Council for Science and Technology will advise on science and technology issues central to the success of the UK. The CST will offer advice to Ministers collectively on the balance and direction of Government-funded science and technology. One of its first tasks will be to contribute to the Forward Look. Such advice will be provided each year and from 1994 the CST will provide a

¹The Committee agreed to accept the White Paper "Realising Our Potential—A Strategy for Science, Engineering and Technology", Cm 2250, as an initial response to its Report.

top-down perspective on the results of the Technology Foresight Programme. Unlike ACOST, the CST will not itself carry out detailed studies on specific issues although it may wish to recommend that studies are carried out by others.

5. *What effect does the OST predict the introduction of the one year MSc, as the normal route to research, will have on the numbers of PhD students? What consultation with industry was undertaken before this decision was taken?*

As the White Paper makes clear, we expect that this policy will lead to a change in the balance of Research Council support for postgraduate students, with more postgraduate awards for Master's level training and fewer awards for the more highly-selected group who go on to undertake a further period of research training. The extent of the change will vary between fields, depending, for example, on the extent to which students already undertake Masters' level training prior to a PhD; it will be for the Research Councils to decide the number of students who should be supported in each field.

We received extensive views from industry as part of the consultation leading up to the White Paper. The policy to move to a Masters year as the normal entry to PhD training was based on a recommendation from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils.

6. *The mission statements for the industry departments indicates that one of these departments' tasks is to "represent the views of business in the development and implementation of Government policy for science and technology." What mechanisms will exist for ensuring consultation between the industry departments and OST?*

Three new mechanisms will be introduced:

- A. Industry Departments will contribute their view of priorities to the new Forward Look.
- B. The Chief Scientists of all Industry Departments will be invited to meetings of the new CST as appropriate.
- C. The Chief Adviser on Science and Technology at the DTI will sit on the Steering Group of the Technology Foresight Programme.

In addition, significant issues will continue to be discussed across all departments at the official committee on S&T and OST will continue to consult informally with other departments on all issues where they have an interest.

I hope these comments are helpful.

