

Royal Society of Chemistry response to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on “Defra Science: Invitation to help frame EFRA Committee inquiry”

The RSC welcomes the opportunity to comment on the scope of the Defra Science inquiry by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

The RSC is the UK Professional Body for chemical scientists and an international Learned Society for advancing the chemical sciences. Supported by a network of over 44,000 members worldwide and an internationally acclaimed publishing business, our activities span education and training, conferences and science policy, and the promotion of the chemical sciences to the public.

This document represents the views of the RSC. The RSC's Royal Charter obliges it to serve the public interest by acting in an independent advisory capacity, and we would therefore be very happy for this submission to be put into the public domain.

The document has been written from the perspective of the Royal Society of Chemistry.

If you would like further information or need anything in this document clarified, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

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The RSC believes that some or all of the areas highlighted below should be considered for inclusion in the committee's inquiry:

1. In order to prioritise research and to formulate an effective strategy, a roadmap of future research, development and deployment needs in the UK is critical. Key areas for funding include the adaptation and mitigation of climate change, sustainable water and food supply and the development of novel agrichemicals. The chemical sciences will have a crucial role to play in training scientists, carrying out fundamental research and promoting interactions with scientists from other disciplines.
2. The RSC believes that the Select Committee should inquire about the way it seeks scientific advice and how it incorporates it into legislation. Learned and professional organisations with access to a large number of experts, such as the RSC, should play a pivotal role in giving balanced scientific advice to Defra. This is particularly important before new legislation is devised that will impact significantly on industrial and research capabilities. Decision making processes need to be made more transparent. Confidence in the process by which scientific advice is incorporated into policy development would be enhanced by providing a publicly available record detailing how scientific advice was used or not.
3. The RSC believes that the Select Committee should inquire about the nature and adequacy of the in house expertise in Government Departments. Even if most advice is to be gathered from outside it is necessary to have sufficient expertise to identify who is technically knowledgeable and to act as 'intelligent customer' for the external advice. In many cases departments lack the competency to frame the question, recruit the appropriate expert or understand the answer when it has been provided.
4. The RSC strongly supports Defra's use of a Chief Scientific Adviser and a Science Advisory Council (SAC). The RSC believes that the operation of the SAC is an area the Select Committee should examine in its inquiry.
5. The RSC believes that the Select Committee should inquire about ways to support multidisciplinary research. Publicly funded science is essential to the future prosperity of the UK. Responsive mode funding is crucial to the long

term success of the UK's scientific research. It is essential to fund multidisciplinary projects, as research grows more and more interdisciplinary. Consortia such as Supergen are essential to improve communication between different research groups and across disciplines.

6. It is particularly important that funding mechanisms are transparent and that the remit of the funding programmes is clear. There still remains confusion amongst scientists – especially at the interface between traditional disciplines – on where to best apply for funding. Funding opportunities need to be publicised widely and openly to improve recognition of their remit. The different funding bodies need to interact closely with each other to ensure that they are systematic in deciding which projects are funded by which funding body. The RSC believes that it is important that the Select Committee enquires about how application processes for funding schemes of all funding bodies can be harmonised to reduce the administrative burden on researchers.

7. In light of long-term challenges such as climate change and sustainability of food and fuel production, funding opportunities should reflect the need for long-term and multidisciplinary projects. The Select Committee should enquire about how funding can be provided for expensive equipment and what mechanisms need to be in place for long-term measurements. The RSC believes that commitment of funding agencies and grant holders need to remain continuous and reliable over a period of time to sustain research groups successfully and to produce reliable data.