



House of Commons
Innovation, Universities,
Science and Skills Committee

**Pre-appointment hearing
with the Chair-elect
of the Economic and
Social Research Council,
Dr Alan Gillespie CBE**

Fifth Report of Session 2008–09



House of Commons
Innovation, Universities,
Science and Skills Committee

**Pre-appointment hearing
with the Chair-elect
of the Economic and
Social Research Council,
Dr Alan Gillespie CBE**

Fifth Report of Session 2008–09

*Report with appendices, together with formal
minutes and oral evidence*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 5 May 2009*

The Innovation, Universities, Science & Skills Committee

The Innovation, Universities, Science & Skills Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

Current membership

Mr Phil Willis (*Liberal Democrat, Harrogate and Knaresborough*)(Chairman)

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (*Labour, City of Durham*)

Mr Tim Boswell (*Conservative, Daventry*)

Mr Ian Cawsey (*Labour, Brigg & Goole*)

Mrs Nadine Dorries (*Conservative, Mid Bedfordshire*)

Dr Ian Gibson (*Labour, Norwich North*)

Dr Evan Harris (*Liberal Democrat, Oxford West & Abingdon*)

Dr Brian Iddon (*Labour, Bolton South East*)

Mr Gordon Marsden (*Labour, Blackpool South*)

Dr Bob Spink (*UK Independence Party, Castle Point*)

Ian Stewart (*Labour, Eccles*)

Graham Stringer (*Labour, Manchester, Blackley*)

Dr Desmond Turner (*Labour, Brighton Kemptown*)

Mr Rob Wilson (*Conservative, Reading East*)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental Select Committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No.152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/ius

A list of reports from the Committee in this Parliament is included at the back of this volume.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are: Sarah Davies (Clerk); Glenn McKee (Second Clerk); Dr Christopher Tyler (Committee Specialist); Ellen Colebrook (Committee Specialist); Ana Ferreira (Senior Committee Assistant); Camilla Brace (Committee Assistant); Anna Browning (Committee Assistant); Jim Hudson (Committee Support Assistant); and Becky Jones (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Innovation, Universities, Science & Skills Committee, Committee Office, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general inquiries is: 020 7219 2793; the Committee's e-mail address is: iuscomm@parliament.uk.

Contents

Report	<i>Page</i>
Summary	3
1 Introduction	4
Pre-appointment hearings	4
Scrutiny of Research Council appointments	4
2 Background to the post	6
The Economic and Social Research Council	6
The role of the Chair	6
3 The recruitment process	8
4 The candidate	9
5 Our questioning	10
6 Conclusion	11
Appendix 1	12
Annex A	13
Annex B	16
Annex C	19
Appendix 2	21
Formal Minutes	22
Witnesses	23
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	24

Summary

On 5 May 2009 we held a pre-appointment hearing with the Chair-elect of the Economic and Social Research Council, Dr Alan Gillespie CBE. On the basis of the evidence provided at this hearing we have concluded that he is a suitable candidate for the post.

1 Introduction

Pre-appointment hearings

1. Government proposals for pre-appointment hearings were set out in the 2007 Green Paper *The Governance of Britain*. The Government sought to “involve Parliament in the appointment of key public officials” to “positions in which Parliament has a particularly strong interest because the officeholder exercises statutory or other powers in relation to protecting the public’s rights and interests”.¹ The paper continued:

The hearing would be non-binding, but in light of the report from the committee Ministers would decide whether to proceed. The hearings would cover issues such as the candidate’s suitability for the role, his or her key priorities, and the process used in selection.²

2. The Liaison Committee subsequently produced a set of guidelines to ensure pre-appointment hearings are conducted appropriately, and in order to “maintain an appointments process which is proportionate and continues to attract high-quality candidates”.³ The Liaison Committee also consulted with select committee chairmen on which posts should be subject to such hearings.⁴

Scrutiny of Research Council appointments

3. Between 2003 and 2007, prior to the introduction of pre-appointment hearings, the former Science and Technology Committee held introductory hearings with newly appointed Chairmen and Chief Executives of Research Councils soon after they had taken up their posts.⁵ These hearings aimed to “satisfy parliament that the post has been filled with someone of sufficient calibre”, and to facilitate understanding of the role and interests of both parties.⁶ Following the *Governance of Britain* proposals, the Committee stated:

We are pleased that the Government is taking steps to involve select committees more fully in the scrutiny of public appointments. We believe that pre-appointment hearings with the relevant Select Committee will improve accountability and help ensure that the right people are appointed to key positions. We recommend that

1 Ministry of Justice, *The Governance of Britain* (Cm 7170), July 2007, p 28

2 As above, p 29

3 House of Commons Liaison Committee, First Report of Session 2007–2008, *Pre-appointment hearings by select committees*, HC 384

4 As above.

5 Sir John Chisholm, Chairman of MRC, July 07 (HC 746); Mr Ed Wallis, Chief Executive of NERC, April 07 (HC 747–i); Professor Philip Esler, Chief Executive of AHRC, February 07 (HC 310–i); Professor Keith Mason, Chief Executive of PPARC, January 06 (HC 808–i); Professor Alan Thorpe, Chief Executive of NERC, October 05 (HC 491–i); Professor Colin Blakemore, Chief Executive of MRC, December 03 (HC 55); Professor Ian Diamond, Chief Executive of ESRC, January 03 (HC 277–i).

6 House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2006–2007, *Chairman of the Medical Research Council: Introductory Hearing*, HC 746, p 3

Chairpersons and Chief Executives of the Research Councils be included in the proposed list of appointments that should be subject to these hearings.⁷

4. Such appointments were not originally included in the Government's list of posts to be subject to pre-appointment hearings. They were proposed by our Chairman during the Liaison Committee consultation,⁸ and the Government's response included Research Council Chairs in a revised list of suitable posts.⁹

5. The Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the Rt Hon John Denham MP, wrote to the Chairman on 6 April 2009 indicating that Dr Alan Gillespie CBE had been identified as the preferred candidate for the post of Chair of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).¹⁰ We were pleased to have the opportunity to question Dr Gillespie prior to his appointment.

7 HC (2006–07) 746, p 6

8 HC (2007–08) 384, p 20

9 House of Commons Liaison Committee, *Pre-appointment hearings by select committees: Government response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2007–2008*, HC 594, p 6

10 Appendix 1

2 Background to the post

The Economic and Social Research Council

6. The ESRC was formed from the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), which was established by Royal Charter in 1965. The SSRC became ESRC in 1983, following a 1982 review by Lord Rothschild which recommended a “stronger focus on empirical research and on research considered of ‘public concern’”.¹¹ The Mission of ESRC (set out in full in its Royal Charter [Appendix 2]) is to promote and support research in the social sciences, including providing trained social scientists, and providing advice, disseminating knowledge, and promoting the public understanding of the social sciences.¹² ESRC is, like the six other Research Councils, a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS).

7. Of the seven Research Councils sponsored by DIUS, ESRC has one of the smallest budget allocations (£165 million in 2008–2009), second only to the Arts and Humanities Research Council.¹³ ESRC funds social science across a wide range of disciplines “from economics through psychology to anthropology, and from issues such as environmental sustainability and international security to youth crime and family welfare”.¹⁴ Its Strategic Priorities for 2005–2010 were informed by consultation with stakeholders across sectors in 2004, a process described as “a credit to the Council” by the former Science and Technology Committee.¹⁵ Priorities identified included increasing responsive mode funding, improving connections with end users of research and increasing internationalisation.¹⁶ ESRC has recently completed a consultation on its 2009–2014 Strategic Plan, due to be published in May 2009.¹⁷ The Council works with stakeholders across sectors and holds concordats with several Government departments, devolved administrations, public agencies and with the third sector. These aim to facilitate “liaison and collaboration” with end users of ESRC research.¹⁸

The role of the Chair

8. The Chair of ESRC “is responsible for the overall direction and management” of the ESRC Council,¹⁹ which is made up of 10 to 18 members appointed by the Government from the academic, business and public sectors.²⁰ The Chair and Chief Executive are also

11 ESRC, *SSRC/ESRC: The first forty years*, p 17
www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC_40YR_ANNI_tcm6-15390.pdf

12 www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/Royal%20Charter%201994_tcm6-1798.pdf

13 DIUS, *The Allocations of the Science Budget 2008/09 to 2010/11*, December 2007, p 29

14 ESRC Strategic Plan 2005–2010, p 5

15 House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, First Report of Session 2004–05, *The Work of the Economic and Social Research Council*, HC 13, p 9

16 ESRC Strategic Plan 2005–2010

17 www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/strategicplan/

18 www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/KnowledgeExch/Working_with_government.aspx

19 Annex B to Appendix 1, The Role of Chair

20 www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/Royal%20Charter%201994_tcm6-1798.pdf

Council members.²¹ Council decides “all issues of major importance” to ESRC, “including issues of corporate strategy, key strategic objectives and targets, major decisions involving the use of financial or other resources, and personal issues, including key appointments”.²² A series of Research Boards (each chaired by a Council member) and Committees report to, and advise on behalf of, ESRC Council.²³ The Chief Executive of ESRC works to implement ESRC Council’s policies and decisions. The current Chief Executive and interim Chair is Professor Ian Diamond, who was appointed in 2003 and re-appointed in 2006 until December 2010.²⁴ The previous Chair, Lord Turner, retired from the post in September 2008 to become Chair of the Financial Services Authority.²⁵

9. The job specification states that the appointment to the role of Chair “is for four years in the first instance, with the possibility of re-appointment”. Around 24 days a year are expected to be dedicated to the role. An “honorarium” (currently £16,180 a year) is paid.²⁶

10. Key responsibilities of the Chair as set out in the job description are appended to this report as Annex B to Appendix 1.

21 www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/what_to_do/OurOrganisationandstructure/TheESRCCouncil/current_council_membership/index.aspx#0

22 *ESRC Code of Practice for Members of Board, Committees and Groups*, February 2000, p 2

23 www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/what%5Fto%5Fdo/OurOrganisationandstructure/TheESRCCouncil/

24 www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/PO/releases/2006/june/ce.aspx

25 www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/PO/ESRC_Executives/Chair/

26 Annex B to Appendix 1, Job description

