



House of Commons  
Science and Technology  
Committee

---

**Treasury Chief  
Scientific Adviser**

---

**Oral evidence**

*7 September 2011*

***Dr James Richardson**, Director of Public Spending,  
Chief Microeconomist and Chief Scientific Adviser,  
HM Treasury, and **Professor Sir John Beddington**,  
Government Chief Scientific Adviser*

*Ordered by The House of Commons  
to be printed 7 September 2011*

## The Science and Technology Committee

The Science and Technology Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Office for Science and associated public bodies.

### Current membership

Andrew Miller (*Labour, Ellesmere Port and Neston*) (*Chair*)  
Gavin Barwell (*Conservative, Croydon Central*)  
Gregg McClymont (*Labour, Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East*)  
Stephen Metcalfe (*Conservative, South Basildon and East Thurrock*)  
David Morris (*Conservative, Morecambe and Lunesdale*)  
Stephen Mosley (*Conservative, City of Chester*)  
Pamela Nash (*Labour, Airdrie and Shotts*)  
Jonathan Reynolds (*Labour/Co-operative, Stalybridge and Hyde*)  
Alok Sharma (*Conservative, Reading West*)  
Graham Stringer (*Labour, Blackley and Broughton*)  
Roger Williams (*Liberal Democrat, Brecon and Radnorshire*)

### 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](http://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 <http://www.parliament.uk/science>.

The Reports of the Committee, the formal minutes relating to that report, oral evidence taken and some or all written evidence are available in printed volume(s).

Additional written evidence may be published on the internet only.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are: Mrs Elizabeth Flood (Clerk); Dr Stephen McGinness (Second Clerk); Dr Farrah Bhatti (Committee Specialist); Xameerah Malik (Committee Specialist); Andy Boyd (Senior Committee Assistant); Julie Storey (Committee Assistant); and Becky Jones (Media Officer).

### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Science and Technology 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: [scitechcom@parliament.uk](mailto:scitechcom@parliament.uk).

# List of witnesses

---

**Wednesday 7 September 2011**

*Page*

**Dr James Richardson**, Director of Public Spending, Chief Microeconomist and Chief Scientific Adviser, HM Treasury, and

**Professor Sir John Beddington**, Government Chief Scientific Adviser

Ev 1



# Oral evidence

## Taken before the Science and Technology Committee on Wednesday 7 September 2011

Members present:

Andrew Miller (Chair)

Gavin Barwell  
Stephen Metcalfe  
David Morris

Stephen Mosley  
Graham Stringer  
Roger Williams

### Examination of Witnesses

*Witnesses:* **Dr James Richardson**, Director of Public Spending, Chief Microeconomist and Chief Scientific Adviser, HM Treasury, and **Professor Sir John Beddington**, Government Chief Scientific Adviser, gave evidence.

**Q1 Chair:** We now move straight on to our second panel. We invite Dr Richardson to join you, Sir John. As you can see, Dr Richardson, we are not like the Treasury Select Committee or the Public Accounts Committee. We are very gentle. We want to probe some issues about how you came into post. First of all, welcome. Secondly, can you tell us what happened? What tipped the balance inside the Treasury that persuaded the Treasury to agree to the demands that have been going on for some years from the science community that there really ought to be a CSA? Was it a genuine acceptance that the science community was right and the mandarins were wrong, or was there some other reason?

**Dr Richardson:** I would see it, perhaps, as more of a process than that. Obviously, within the Treasury science is predominantly around social science, particularly economics. I am not a physicist, so please do not ask me about the Higgs Boson. We have had a Chief Economic Adviser in the Treasury since at least the 1960s and the Treasury takes analysis and science very seriously. The question is, then, what do you gain over and above the infrastructure that we have around economics and, indeed, some of the other social science professions within the Treasury by having a Chief Scientific Adviser? There has been a dialogue around that. It would be fair to say that the number of issues on which the overlaps between economics and natural science are coming to the fore are either rising or, as it were, they are at least becoming more prominent in areas like climate change.

Sir John was talking earlier about the Foresight project on computer trading. The big opportunity here is to enforce and enable those wider links between the well-established social science machinery within the Treasury and a broader natural science community that, of course, we have always been engaged with. We can strengthen that. The realisation was that there was an opportunity here that was well worth taking. That is what led us down this route.

**Q2 Chair:** There was no notification—no press notice—about your appointment. I was at a dinner in the City when I was told of your appointment, which seems appropriate, I guess, but it was an odd way in

which your appointment was announced. What was the reason for that?

**Dr Richardson:** It is an internal appointment. We do not normally announce internal appointments through the media. The Permanent Secretary wrote to Sir John to set it out, as we would with, say, my previous appointment as the Chief Microeconomist within the Treasury. We did not announce that to the press.

**Q3 Chair:** What was the recruitment process?

**Dr Richardson:** It was a process of internal management discussion around, first, the advantages of having a Chief Scientific Adviser. Having concluded that this was an opportunity we wanted to take, our view—I was obviously involved in these discussions with the Permanent Secretary and the Treasury's Chief Economic Adviser—was that it made sense for the Chief Scientific Adviser to be one of the Treasury's chief economists. What we wanted to achieve primarily through this was to strengthen the links between Treasury economics and the broader scientific community. That, really, then left a question about whether that was Dave Ramsden, the Chief Economic Adviser, or myself as the Chief Microeconomist. That was the kind of discussion that we had, over a number of weeks, on the pros and cons of that choice. In the end, the predominant factor was that we saw most of the areas—not all of them, obviously—in which the overlaps were likely to be most beneficial to be on the microeconomic side. It seemed to us to make more sense, at least for the first appointment, for it to be the Chief Microeconomist.

**Q4 Chair:** How do you envisage splitting your time between your current job and the new job description, which will be much broader?

**Dr Richardson:** It is really about the synergies on things where the two overlap. I do not see it as a kind of binary distinction that I spend X day being Chief Scientific Adviser and Y day being Chief Microeconomist and Director of Public Spending. I think the most interesting areas and the things I want to focus on are the areas that benefit all those functions. Therefore, it is really about finding ways of using my time that maximise those kinds of overlap. In that sense, I do not see it as being either one or the

---

7 September 2011 Dr James Richardson and Professor Sir John Beddington

---

other, but about prioritising those things where I can add the most value through being able to do both at once.

**Q5 Stephen Metcalfe:** Sir John, I know that you have been pushing for the Treasury to have a Chief Scientific Adviser for some time, but does the Treasury really need a scientific adviser and, if so, what do you think their role should be?

**Professor Sir John Beddington:** I believe that the need for science and engineering, and science more broadly, is ubiquitous in serving Governments. Science and engineering, including social science, economics and social research, are the primary ways of providing objective evidence to help Government develop a policy.

There are areas—James has alluded to a couple of them—where knowledge of other aspects of science would actually lead to better decision-making. Let us think about some of the issues—really quite profound—which concern how climate change is likely to affect the world economy as well as how it is likely to affect the United Kingdom in terms of all aspects—not just climate change within the UK, but international change. This is the sort of thing where you need input, and not just from within a Department. It is very much a cross- departmental area.

The other aspect is that there needs to be a more joined-up operation in analysis generally in Government. We have a Heads of Analysis Group, but it is very much a group led by the Permanent Secretary in the Treasury, and it is very much a heads of profession group rather than a heads of advisers group. Now we have a situation in the chief scientific advisers, with the exception of somebody with a background in social research, where we have doctors, economists, mathematicians, physical scientists, biological scientists and medics. That provides a real cross-section of the key areas, which can influence each other.

As you know, we have both formal and informal meetings of chief scientists. We are changing that pattern slightly to accommodate James. It was not just for James, but we have problems with breakfast meetings with people having to deliver children to school. That applied to a number of people. We are changing that pattern so that, once a month, we will have a lunch meeting.

**Q6 Stephen Metcalfe:** You would see this as a positive step.

**Professor Sir John Beddington:** Very much so.

**Q7 Stephen Metcalfe:** And the way the role has been described, you say it is likely to work.

**Professor Sir John Beddington:** Yes.

**Q8 Stephen Metcalfe:** You see that as an advantage within the Treasury, and a real positive advantage, not just ticking a box.

**Professor Sir John Beddington:** The point here is that I have got somebody to phone up, haven't I?

**Q9 Stephen Metcalfe:** Are you saying that you did not have before then?

**Professor Sir John Beddington:** I did, but if I was phoning the Chief Economist and I am saying, "I want to talk to you about physics," that is a slightly different issue. Of course, there is someone who deals with science expenditure within the Treasury, Peter Schofield, who I would talk to about matters of expenditure. This is what I feel will be advantageous: the Treasury's perspective on some of our science issues is going to be extremely important, and we would expect it to be fed by James into our discussions. We have had the first meeting.

**Q10 Stephen Metcalfe:** I am sorry to interrupt you, but to do that do you not need a broad background in science rather than a particular social science? I think Dr Richardson said, "Don't ask me about the Higgs Boson," except we don't know the potential growth that may come from discovering the Higgs Boson and what the spin-off from that may be. Do you not need to have a wider range of knowledge than the social sciences?

**Professor Sir John Beddington:** We do, of course. Obviously, we have a much wider community than that of the chief scientific advisers. We have just been discussing the Council for Science and Technology, which we link in. That has the four main academies involved. We meet regularly with, I suppose, the academic community as embodied by the academies. For example, at a meeting about a month or so ago, Paul Nurse, the President of the Royal Society, came along and we were talking about the way in which modern genomics can actually affect our pharmaceutical industry and the economy generally. That led on to two and a half hours briefing the Prime Minister, involving both industry and scientists, on where modern genomics could go and help problems right across the board from the Health Service through to some of the issues of the health of our various industries. You are right, of course. A group of 15 or so people is not going to be omniscient, but the networking that that provides is really very effective. I see that many of these issues are going to be resolved, quite often, at informal levels, but some will need them to be more formal. For example, the Secretary of State for International Development has asked me to look at a project, which is how science can contribute to better predicting and mitigating humanitarian disasters. This is early days in the study. It comes from a recommendation in a report on humanitarian disasters that Lord Ashdown produced. It recommended specifically that chief scientific advisers should take that forward. The socio-economics of disasters is so important. Yes, you can predict earthquakes. Actually, the answer is that you cannot predict earthquakes, but you can predict various natural phenomena on various time scales. You can predict areas of risk, but there is also a socio-economic component. That is an example of how having that sort of input will be really quite useful.

**Q11 Stephen Metcalfe:** Dr Richardson, welcome to your new role. How much does the Treasury spend on

---

7 September 2011 Dr James Richardson and Professor Sir John Beddington

---

research and innovation at the moment, and will you have a role in determining where that will be directed?

**Dr Richardson:** Thank you for your welcome. We do not have an enormous research budget in the sense of going out and buying research ourselves. We expect to spend about half a million pounds on that over the Spending Review period. I will play a role in making those decisions, but it is not, obviously, a substantial sum of money and the Treasury has never had a substantial research budget. We tend to operate more—this is common to a lot of the ways in which we operate—through others, through Departments and through our relationships with, particularly, the ESRC to try and promote a greater degree of policy relevant to research in areas that we are interested in. If there is a particular need, we may go out. For example, the Banking Commission has commissioned some research off our budget, but we normally work through others. Obviously, that is where the money is. That is more generally the case. Although all the money is, in some senses, allocated out by the Treasury, we do not sit on a very large amount of it ourselves. That is spent by other Departments, but we seek to use our seat at the table to promote things that we think are important.

**Q12 Stephen Metcalfe:** That half a million pounds is over the four year period, is it?

**Dr Richardson:** Yes.

**Q13 Stephen Metcalfe:** Do you think that is enough now that you have a slightly different role than you had before? Are there areas you have already identified that, by spending a little more money, you could use some research that might give better guidance to Departments in the Treasury?

**Dr Richardson:** There may be a case where, when I look at something, I think, “The only answer or the best answer to this is for the Treasury to undertake a piece of primary research,” in which case I have plenty of access to the top team at the Treasury and can make my case. The normal approach that we would take, in that circumstance, would be to talk to the lead Department, say, on climate change, which would be DECC, in most cases—obviously, DEFRA and others have a role—to seek to influence the work that they are doing rather than, as it were, spend the money ourselves. That is the general approach the Treasury takes. We do not seek to suck the money into the Treasury building. We try and put it out there and make sure it is spent well.

**Q14 Stephen Metcalfe:** Can you give me an example of where you have received some scientific advice and how that has then been used to influence Treasury guidance or mismanagement? What is the process? A practical example would be quite useful.

**Dr Richardson:** I have only been in this job for a few weeks. I do not have any examples in the broader sphere as Chief Scientific Adviser, but perhaps I can give you an example I have been quite involved within the economic space. I think this feeds on the point that Sir John was making about the value of science. My background is as a labour economist and I have worked quite heavily in that area within the

Treasury and elsewhere. If you ask yourself why it is that countries like the United Kingdom, and a number of other countries, now have welfare-to-work policies that are much more effective than those we had in, say, the 1970s or the 1980s, the answer is the rigorous application of scientific methods and objective evidence to the problem of how you get people who are out of work back into work. A series of well-designed, well-implemented, scientific studies of that problem in the UK and elsewhere—in the UK starting, particularly, with the ReStart experiment in 1986 and a whole series of things since then in other countries, particularly the United States, but also a number of continental countries—has led us now to have a much better understanding than we had 20 or 30 years ago; indeed, even a much better understanding than when I started down this track. That really does reinforce the points John has made about scientific method, rigorous, objective data, and analysis. Without that, you are in the dark on dealing with problems.

**Q15 Stephen Metcalfe:** Am I right in thinking that that information—that advice or evidence—was being handled by the Enterprise and Growth team before? The Treasury has an Enterprise and Growth team. Is that right?

**Dr Richardson:** The Enterprise and Growth group are responsible, among other things, for the funding of science—indeed, the funding of BIS—so they look after and are the key contact point for the science budget. The evidence base around welfare-to-work programmes would be dealt with, predominantly, by our labour market policy team, which faces out towards the Department for Work and Pensions and its various predecessors, which have faced out to the relevant Government Departments. We also have a team that looks after the public sector work force issues, and they work directly to me.

**Q16 Stephen Metcalfe:** I have a final question. What makes you the right person to be doing this job? What did you say at the interview that persuaded people you are the right person to be taking on what I think is quite an important role?

**Dr Richardson:** To some extent, it is for others to judge whether I am the right person or not. I do not want to sit here and say, “I’m fantastic.” I will let other people judge that for themselves. The key point that is relevant here is our view that economics is the predominant science—obviously, social science—within the Treasury. If we are going to make this work, it seemed to us that having a Chief Economist as Chief Scientific Adviser was the best way of doing that. As the Chief Microeconomist, the links were probably stronger for me than for Dave Ramsden, the Chief Economic Adviser. However, this is the Treasury’s first Chief Scientific Adviser. I tend to be reasonably empiricist in my approach. We think this is the best thing to do. “If it turns out to be otherwise,” to paraphrase Keynes, “we’ll change our minds.”

**Q17 Graham Stringer:** What I would really like to get to the bottom of is how the world will change now that you have this role. Let us take two examples. First, there is a public row going on in the

Government about the cost of renewable energy on energy bills to individuals, so there is a row between DECC and No. 10. How will you involve yourself in that debate and discussion? How will you approach giving advice on that issue?

**Dr Richardson:** I see my role, rather than being about necessarily individual policy issues, although obviously there will be some that I do choose to get involved in—this is the predominant answer to your high-level question of how I hope the world will be better—as promoting better standards of scientific method, evidence and analysis within the Treasury, so that whoever, within the Treasury, is the lead official on any particular issue is better equipped to be that person. I cannot, and no individual can be, involved in every issue that the Treasury is involved in for which scientific questions are relevant because the range of issues that the Treasury is involved in is very large. There may be things for which scientific method is irrelevant, but I struggle to think what they are.

I see the way in which I would hope to achieve success as by encouraging and promoting a more rigorous scientific approach and a better understanding. We have a pretty good approach within the realms of social science within which we have tended to operate, but particularly in promoting the understanding of what other scientists, and natural scientists in particular, have to bring to these topics, which is clearly a lot.

**Q18 Graham Stringer:** That is a very generalised answer, if you do not mind me saying so. Could you be more specific because, within this debate, there are arguments about regressive taxation, whether the estimates are right and about the energy efficiency and costs of wind farms onshore and offshore, and other renewables? How would you approach that problem? You have given me a generalised answer but I am interested in the specifics because this is a real row going on at the time.

**Dr Richardson:** I am afraid a lot of my answers will probably be reasonably generalised simply because I am new in the post. I do not come in with a shopping list of, “Right, there are 15 things I want to do at the specific level.” The first thing I want to do, and I have already started doing that with a lot of help from Sir John and his colleagues, is talk to my fellow chief scientific advisers and talk to other people in the scientific community about how I can best add value. I do not want to say that I will definitely do X, Y and Z. Before that, I should talk to people who have a lot to add to my understanding.

Some of the issues that you raise are issues of a sort that I already get involved with from time to time. A key issue that is directly relevant is how we appraise investment of Government or mixed Government and private finance in projects. We use the Green Book approach for that. That is one of the things that I am already responsible for. We look at issues like, for example, the carbon price. That is something where DECC has led the work, but I was very involved in the discussions about new approaches of assessing what the price of carbon is, trying to ensure that those were as rigorous as they could be, that they were consistent with the broader approach we took to

policy appraisal and that they were understood across the Government Economic Service, so that not only did we have a theoretically robust approach to pricing carbon, but people actually then went out and used it. Those are the kinds of ways that I might intervene in these kinds of policy question. As I say, I am not going to be the person who tries to solve every policy question within the Treasury that involves evidence. It is not possible.

**Q19 Graham Stringer:** I am interested in how you got the job. You went through the public expenditure review last year without having this job title. I am interested in whether, now you have the job title, you would approach the tasks differently. If so, how would you approach it differently?

**Dr Richardson:** What I would seek to do in a future Spending Review that I did not do in the one that we have had would be to engage with the scientific community in the way that I was quite heavily engaged with the Government Economic Service community. It is not in terms of questions around science funding. Those are not part of my role. I should be clear with the Committee that it is not my job to hold the candle for any particular element of science funding.

**Q20 Graham Stringer:** Just to interrupt on that point for a moment, you will not be advocating particular levels of expenditure around departmental research?

**Dr Richardson:** I should distinguish two things here. On the science budget as a whole, set in the Spending Review as part of the BIS settlement, I will not play any different role than I do at the moment. The Treasury’s role is to run the spending review and hold the ring on that. It is not our role to advocate the spending on particular areas. Others in the science community are perfectly capable of doing that, as indeed in all areas of public expenditure.

Once Departments have their budgets, there is, obviously, the question of what they spend their research budgets on. Whereas Sir John said there is a process that involves his office and the Treasury to ensure that Departments are not taking short-term decisions to cut their research budget that have negative effects for other Departments, I would certainly be available to play a role in that if it were needed. This mechanism has been in existence for a while and so far we have not been called on to go to a Department and say, “Look, we think this is a mistake.” That might be a role I would get involved in with Sir John as part of that arrangement. As to the aggregate level of the settlement in the Spending Review, it is quite important that the Treasury, in holding the ring on spending reviews, is not then trying to be a player within that ring. We have to ensure that the allocation process takes into account everybody’s interests, not just those of particular groups.

**Professor Sir John Beddington:** In answer to your previous question, which is to do with renewable energy—the cost, the efficiency and the technologies—quite clearly there are economic issues, but there are also engineering and engineering efficiency issues. At breakfast this morning, we were



---

7 September 2011 Dr James Richardson and Professor Sir John Beddington

---

having a discussion with the Chief Scientific Adviser for DECC, David MacKay, on issues like this. This is one of the values of the network. There will be technical issues here and, while primarily engineering, there will be economic issues. The fact that we will have the opportunity for James, David and others who play in this arena to actually discuss is advantageous. Are there a set of issues that we absolutely have to address as a group of chief scientific advisers? The answer is that we try to have a round table and say, "What are the big problems out there? Where do other Departments play in?" We do that on a very regular basis. This is one that we discussed this morning. There was nothing definitive coming from it, but I expect the discussions will continue.

**Q21 Graham Stringer:** I accept that. I was just trying to find out how having a Scientific Adviser in the Treasury would affect that debate. I am grateful for that. I cannot resist this last question. You have said you do not understand the Higgs Boson, and neither does anybody else, I do not think, apart from three or four people in Switzerland. One of Sir John's predecessors, Lord Snow, once said: "You can't consider yourself educated if you don't know the second law of thermodynamics." Do you?

**Dr Richardson:** I do know the second law of thermodynamics. I believe it was John Stuart Mill who was considered to be the last person on earth who knew everything. Since then, we can all be excused for not knowing everything. I was always taught that the laws of thermodynamics came down to, you can't win, you can't break even and you can't get out of the game.

**Chair:** It sounds like dealing with the Treasury to me.

**Dr Richardson:** Indeed. It is not all that different, perhaps, from public expenditure control.

**Q22 David Morris:** Dr Richardson, going on to the laws of thermodynamics, how frequently do you meet with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Treasury Chief Secretary and other Ministers?

**Dr Richardson:** I meet with them on a very regular basis. I have already met the Chief Secretary to the Treasury twice this week. I expect to meet him at least one more time this week. I am not expecting to meet the Chancellor this week, but I met him last week and the week before. It is normally the case that I would meet at least one of the Treasury's two Cabinet Ministers every single week, not necessarily in recess, although I did meet, over the summer, both of our Cabinet Ministers at least once during the recess period.

**Q23 David Morris:** How will you maintain independence from the Treasury and provide a challenge to function? As the senior official, how independent can you be from that Department?

**Dr Richardson:** I do not see my role as being out there, in public, expressing personal opinions on Treasury policy. Obviously, I am a civil servant and that would be quite inappropriate. But within the Department—the core of the role, as I see it, is to promote scientific method within the Department—it is the role of every civil servant to be impartial and

objective, and these are the values set out in the civil service code. It is absolutely the case that that is the job of the civil servant—to be an independent source of advice within the Department on issues of evidence to put forward the best available analysis of the facts and the options to Ministers. I see that as having always been part of my role and that there is no conflict here.

**Q24 David Morris:** Do you foresee, within the Treasury, a situation where you may have to challenge your own team or even yourself? How would such a conflict of interest be avoided or managed?

**Dr Richardson:** I do not see it as a conflict of interest. It is always the case, and it is particularly the case in economics—it is famously a subject in which economists do not tend to agree with one another—that there is a lot of lively debate. It is a matter of public record that Treasury officials tend to have lively debate among themselves and with Ministers. I have not read Mr. Darling's memoirs, which are out today, but certainly some of his predecessors have commented on the fact that Treasury officials will merrily debate the issues in front of Ministers in such a way when they had found in previous Departments they had been in that you tended to get the party line. The Treasury is an environment in which debate is encouraged and promoted, and in which the most junior official has no fear about contradicting the most senior in front of the Minister if they have a view and a piece of information to put forward and add to the debate. I certainly do not see there being a conflict of interest. It is consistent with the culture in which the Treasury operates. As I say, that is perhaps not surprising for a Department that has quite a lot of economists in it.

**Q25 Roger Williams:** It must be very satisfying, Sir John, at this stage in your career as Government Chief Scientific Adviser, that you have a full hand of chief scientific advisers in each Department. Those can only be effective if there are people in those posts. As I understand it, there are vacancies in Transport, BIS and Culture, Media and Sport. Can you tell us when you expect those appointments to be made and how the process is proceeding?

**Professor Sir John Beddington:** You will probably have seen that the adverts are out. I will be on the panel for the appointment of these positions. In terms of Transport and BIS, it is relatively straightforward in the sense that the adverts make it clear we would be looking for applicants for one or both posts. There may be a situation that we get an applicant who is appropriately qualified to get both positions. Both positions are part-time so that may or may not be advantageous. There is a panel in my diary for late October. That will be the procedure.

With the DCMS the situation is slightly more complicated because, as you are well aware, there is a major reorganisation of DCMS and downsizing of the Department. One of the things being examined is to see whether an incumbent, either for the Transport or the BIS role, might be able to put in some time, part-time, at the DCMS. It is not ideal, but there is a substantial science advisory council for DCMS, which

is chaired by Dr Michael Dixon, who is head of the Natural History Museum. It is a substantial and effective group. It is not ideal. With the hiatus, there have been some fairly major changes in organisations and Departments following the spending review. There has been this hiatus in both Transport and BIS following Brian Collins leaving, and the process took longer than I would have liked.

There was a last-minute issue in that the recruitment consultants said, "Look, with the best will in the world, August is not a very good time to be getting contact for potential things, so can we move it back three weeks?" I thought that that was perfectly sensible. It is a pity that it could not have been brought forward earlier. There were a variety of reasons for it. We now have an advert and clear ideas of the roles that the individual will have. The roles are at the appropriate levels, because that is, obviously, an issue. There is a natural tendency to say, "Do we need a Chief Scientific Adviser to be at this level? Couldn't we have somebody really good at a lower level?" and so on. That has not happened and I am pleased to say that that has not happened.

**Q26 Chair:** On the DCMS issue, that is an incredibly broad role. It ranges from natural history and the protection of historic works of art, all the way through to sports science. Is that really a satisfactory position that you have described?

**Professor Sir John Beddington:** The real difficulty is the size of the Department. That is why I emphasised—

**Q27 Chair:** The job is very broad, though, is it not?

**Professor Sir John Beddington:** This is why I emphasised how important it was that they have a very good and active Science Advisory Council led by Dixon because, as you say, most of the taxonomists in the country fall within that Department. You then have the preservation of national monuments, you have currently got the Olympics, and there are the recent changes in terms of cyber responsibilities. It really is a very wide role. The reality is that they were looking to get help from their Science Advisory Council to address the breadth of the role, but we hope to have it. The previous incumbent, when she left to join the Nuffield Foundation, was, by background, an economist. It worked. I had no reason to be concerned about it. It would be good to have somebody in, but because of the significant constraints that they have in terms of budget, being able to have somebody piggy-back from another Department is appropriate. If that does not happen, we will have to examine something else.

**Q28 Roger Williams:** Would the role also cover broadcasting technology?

**Professor Sir John Beddington:** Yes, absolutely. It is a formidably wide brief from a scientific point of view, but how does someone actually do it in the context of a relatively small Department, which has downsized substantially? I believe there is no Director General, for example. It goes from Permanent Secretary through to Director level. It is quite denuded at that senior level. It is a problem, but it is

recognised. I have been in correspondence with the Permanent Secretary about potential solutions. We are waiting to see whether candidates come through who might be appropriate for Transport two days a week and DCMS for a remaining day, or something like that.

**Q29 Roger Williams:** If there have been some delays in a Government Department, they are very modest compared with the delay in the European Commission, which decided, I think back in 2009, that it was going to appoint a Chief Scientific Adviser. Is there any progress on that?

**Professor Sir John Beddington:** I could not possibly comment about the delays of the European Commission in any detail. That is not my role. Your observation is correct that President Barroso indicated in his acceptance speech in November 2009 that he was appointing a Chief Scientific Adviser and revamping it. Since then, we have engaged quite a bit. I have talked to senior officials, both in his Cabinet and in the areas. I have talked about the general message. I was asked about, and I have informally suggested, I should say, non-UK candidates. The information that we are getting is that they do expect an appointment to be made this autumn. That is two years on from the announcement. I would welcome it. As you are well aware, I did an exercise where I compared and contrasted the level of scientific advice that Obama was getting with that which Barroso was getting. I hope that was a part of the reason why a decision was made, although this has taken two years to reach fruition. I have no guarantee that there will be an appointment, but all the indications that we are getting informally is that they hope to make an appointment during the autumn.

**Q30 Roger Williams:** What sort of relationship would you have with that scientific adviser?

**Professor Sir John Beddington:** I would hope to build it very quickly. The mechanism that allows me to operate internationally with, essentially, my equivalents is the Carnegie Group, which has a mix of Chief Scientific Advisers and Science Ministers from the G8, and recently from the G8+5. We meet once a year. We are meeting in South Africa in November. The sort of people who will be there would be John Holdren from the USA, the Chief Scientific Adviser from Japan and at the last meeting in Canada we had the Science Minister from China. The host for this Carnegie meeting will be the Science Minister from South Africa. We meet regularly. They are informal meetings, but that is a way, in a sense, of getting to know each other. The person who had previously represented the Commission at these meetings, and who attended the last meeting, was at one time the Commissioner for Research and is now the Director General for Research. I would expect the Chief Scientific Adviser to attend so that would be a chance to meet. It is so important that one would be able to engage.

In some commentary that came out from the Commission, they said that they would hope the Chief Scientific Adviser would be able to engage with me and Patrick Cunningham, who is the Chief Scientific

---

7 September 2011 Dr James Richardson and Professor Sir John Beddington

---

Adviser for Ireland. I would put significant amounts of time and effort into trying to work closely, because it is so important.

What is interesting is that, in relation to the role of the Chief Scientific Adviser, countries in Europe have said to me informally, "It seems a bit odd we haven't got one." That doesn't mean to say anything will happen, but this is an issue that I believe will become more prominent. I would be absolutely delighted, Mr Williams, to say that if, when I left, there was not only

a Chief Scientific Adviser in every Department of the United Kingdom, but that there was one in a significant proportion of European Union countries.

**Chair:** Gentlemen, thank you very much. It has been very informative. I do worry, Sir John, when you start a sentence with, "I could not possibly comment." Dr Richardson, we are still not sure whether you are the poacher or the gamekeeper for the science community. Thank you both very much for your attendance.

Distributed by TSO (The Stationery Office) and available from:

**Online**

[www.tsoshop.co.uk](http://www.tsoshop.co.uk)

**Mail, Telephone, Fax & E-mail**

TSO

PO Box 29, Norwich NR3 1GN

General enquiries 0870 600 5522

Order through the Parliamentary Hotline *Lo-call* 0845 7 023474

Fax orders: 0870 600 5533

Email: [customer.services@tso.co.uk](mailto:customer.services@tso.co.uk)

Textphone: 0870 240 3701

**The Parliamentary Bookshop**

12 Bridge Street, Parliament Square

London SW1A 2JX

Telephone orders: 020 7219 3890

General enquiries: 020 7219 3890

Fax orders: 020 7219 3866

Email: [bookshop@parliament.co.uk](mailto:bookshop@parliament.co.uk)

Internet: <http://www.bookshop.parliament.uk>

**TSO@Blackwell and other Accredited Agents**

© *Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2011*

*This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at [www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright/](http://www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright/)*



ISBN 978-0-215-03847-0

