



HOUSE OF LORDS

Science and Technology Committee

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3rd Report of Session 2006–07

# Annual Report for 2006

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Ordered to be printed 1 February and published 8 February 2007

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Published by the Authority of the House of Lords

*London* : The Stationery Office Limited  
£price

HL Paper 45

### *Science and Technology Committee*

The Science and Technology Committee is appointed by the House of Lords in each session “to consider science and technology”.

### *Current Membership*

The Members of the Science and Technology Committee are:

Lord Broers (chairman)  
Lord Colwyn  
Baroness Finlay of Llandaff (co-opted)  
Lord Haskel  
Lord Howie of Troon  
Lord May of Oxford  
Lord O’Neill of Clackmannan  
Lord Patel  
Lord Paul  
Baroness Perry of Southwark  
Baroness Platt of Writtle  
Earl of Selborne  
Baroness Sharp of Guildford  
Lord Sutherland of Houndwood  
Lord Taverne

### *Information about the Committee and Publications*

Information about the Science and Technology Committee, including details of current inquiries, can be found on the internet at <http://www.parliament.uk/hlscience/>. Committee publications, including reports, press notices, transcripts of evidence and government responses to reports, can be found at the same address.

Committee reports are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House.

### *General Information*

General information about the House of Lords and its Committees, including guidance to witnesses, details of current inquiries and forthcoming meetings is on the internet at: [http://www.parliament.uk/about\\_lords/about\\_lords.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/about_lords/about_lords.cfm).

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# Annual Report for 2006

## REPORT

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### Introduction

1. This is the second Annual Report of the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee. As explained in our first Annual Report for 2005, our object in making an Annual Report is three-fold:
  - To make available to Members of the House and the public the principles which guide our work, along with a summary of our activities over the preceding calendar year;
  - To review the impact of the Committee's work, including recent developments relevant to Reports that we have made in previous years;
  - To comment on other matters relevant to the work of the Committee, such as the quality and timeliness of Government responses, debates, and so on.

### The role and working methods of the Committee

2. A summary of the principles by which we decide our programme or work and assess our performance is given in Box 1. It incorporates the essential elements of the "*Aide-Mémoire on the Role of the Committee*", agreed shortly after the Committee's first appointment in 1979, (which, as revised in 1990, is reprinted in Appendix 1), as well as less formal principles endorsed in recent years.

#### BOX 1

##### Summary of the role of the Committee

The Committee is appointed to consider science and technology and to report to the House on matters within this field with which Parliament ought to be concerned.

Such matters include areas where Parliament itself has a role; where Government or statutory bodies are or should be involved; or where there is a strong public interest or concern.

In choosing subjects the Committee pays special attention to the applications of science and technology, in order to identify issues likely to be of political significance. It also seeks to—

- Identify subjects where it can make timely and useful recommendations;
- Achieve a balanced work programme, for instance by combining biological or medical subjects with engineering or technology;
- Identify subjects that involve a range of Government Departments or other agencies and bodies;
- Avoid duplication with the work of other bodies.

3. Although the Committee is tasked, like all investigative Select Committees, with contributing to parliamentary scrutiny of Government, it has no specific scrutiny role with regard to the Office of Science and Innovation (previously the Office of Science and Technology) or the Research Councils. Such scrutiny, along with detailed examination of Government expenditure on science and technology, is the responsibility of the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology, and we do not seek to duplicate their work.
4. Most inquiries are undertaken by specially appointed sub-committees, of which there are normally two in existence at any one time. Typically the Select Committee chooses a topic for investigation and appoints a sub-committee, selecting a Chairman and most of the members from among its own membership. The Committee in addition has the power to co-opt any Member of the House to serve on sub-committees for the duration of their inquiries. Although the sub-committees are referred to for convenience as “Sub-Committee I” and “Sub-Committee II”, in reality they operate like freestanding *ad hoc* Select Committees. They appoint their own Specialist Advisers, and conduct detailed inquiries lasting normally from six to twelve months. Once the inquiry is complete the sub-committee reports back to the Select Committee and is dissolved.
5. Occasionally the Select Committee decides to undertake a shorter inquiry itself, normally to follow up an earlier sub-committee inquiry. Thus in 2006 we conducted an inquiry into *Science Teaching in Schools*, following up our 2000 report *Science and Society*, and a 2001 follow-up, *Science in Schools*. Towards the end of 2006 we launched a short inquiry into *Radioactive Waste Management*, another subject in which we have produced a series of reports dating back to 1999.
6. The Committee’s power of co-option means that 29 Members of the House participated directly in the work of either the Select Committee or its sub-committees over the year.
7. The Select Committee and its sub-committees are normally supported by a staff of five: two Clerks (one of whom clerks both the Select Committee and a sub-committee); one Committee Specialist; and two Secretarial Administrators. However, in reality for much of 2006 the Committee was short-staffed—the post of Committee Specialist being vacant from February to May, and one of the Secretarial Administrator posts being vacant from October to the end of the year. In addition, temporary Specialist Advisers, normally eminent figures from academia, are appointed to support particular inquiries.

### Summary of activity in 2006

8. During 2006 the Select Committee and its sub-committees held 43 meetings in Westminster, 24 of these in public; they also made 13 visits, two of which were to destinations overseas, the rest within the United Kingdom. Of the latter, three visits were for the purpose of informal all-day seminars to launch inquiries. A summary of meetings, visits, and outcomes, is given in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**Summary of Activity in 2006**

<b>Committee/ Subject</b>	<b>Meetings (in public)</b>	<b>Visits</b>	<b>Status of inquiry</b>	<b>Debate/ Government Response</b>
<b>Select Committee</b>				
Private deliberative meetings	9 (0)	0		<i>Pandemic Influenza</i> debated 20 January 2006; Government response published as Command Paper in February
Science Teaching in Schools	4 (4)	2 (York; Reading)	Report published November 2006	Response to <i>Science Teaching in Schools</i> received December 2006; debate to follow in 2007.
<b>Sub-Committee I</b>				
Ageing: Scientific Aspects	N/A	N/A	Original report published July 2005; follow-up reports March 2006 and December 2006	Debated in Grand Committee 5 June 2006
Water Management	10 (7)	2 (Australia; Essex)	Report published June 2006; follow-up report January 2007	Response received August 2006; debated in House 13 October 2006
Allergy	4(3)	2 (Royal Society of Medicine; Evelina Children's Hospital)	Report expected mid-2007	
<b>Sub-Committee II</b>				
Energy Efficiency	N/A	N/A	Original report published July 2005; follow-up report January 2006	Response received October 2005; debated in House 27 April 2006
Science and Heritage	13 (8)	6 (Hampton Court; National Gallery; Italy; Blickling Hall; Down House; Liverpool)	Report published November 2006	Response published as Command Paper 31 January 2007; debate to follow
Personal Internet Security	3(2)	1 (Institute of Engineering and Technology)	Report expected mid-2007	

9. 2006 was thus an extremely busy year. The Committee published eight reports. Of the three major reports two, *Water Management* and *Science and Heritage*, were the products of detailed sub-committee inquiries; the third, *Science Teaching in Schools*, was the result of a short inquiry by the Select Committee itself. The other reports included our *Annual Report for 2005*, reports following up earlier inquiries, and a report of a one-off meeting with the then Energy Minister, Malcolm Wicks MP, in March.
10. Three debates were held on the floor of the House on our reports: *Pandemic Influenza* was debated on 20 January,<sup>1</sup> *Energy Efficiency* was debated on 27 April,<sup>2</sup> and *Water Management* on 13 October.<sup>3</sup> Our report on *Ageing: Scientific Aspects* was debated in Grand Committee on 5 June.<sup>4</sup>
11. We comment in more detail on particular themes in our work and on individual inquiries, taken in broadly chronological order, below.

### *Energy*

12. Between 2003 and 2005 we conducted two major inquiries on energy policy, focusing on aspects of the Government's 2003 Energy White Paper, which set out their strategy for achieving secure, low-carbon energy supplies. The first of these, chaired by Lord Oxburgh, was on *Renewable Energy: Practicalities*; the second, chaired by Baroness Perry of Southwark, was on *Energy Efficiency*. Our two reports appeared in July 2004 and July 2005 respectively.
13. Both inquiries revealed confusion at the heart of Government policy, particularly between the various areas of responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry, which is responsible for the electricity generating industry, and the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), which is responsible for energy efficiency (and thus end use of electricity), as well as for parts of the generating industry itself (such as biomass or Combined Heat and Power). As we described in our *Annual Report for 2005*, neither report elicited a satisfactory response from the Government.
14. The Government then launched a major Review of energy policy in the first half of 2006, chaired by the then Energy Minister, Mr Malcolm Wicks MP. In order both to maintain our scrutiny of the Government energy policy, and to ensure that our earlier recommendations were fully considered within the Review, we therefore invited Mr Wicks to give evidence to us on 29 March. The transcript of that meeting was published as a short report in May, and although Mr Wicks was, perhaps predictably, non-committal, it is pleasing that in the Review itself the Government moved significantly in the direction outlined in our reports on energy policy.
15. To take one example, in our report on *Renewable Energy: Practicalities* we noted that the Government's chief instrument for promoting renewable sources of electricity, the Renewables Obligation (RO), would "favour near-competitive technologies that will start to generate income rapidly ... at present only onshore wind fits this description", and we urged the

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<sup>1</sup> HL Deb, cols. 883–929.

<sup>2</sup> HL Deb, cols. 356–386.

<sup>3</sup> HL Deb, cols. 480–524.

<sup>4</sup> HL Deb, cols. GC289–328.





*Ageing: Scientific Aspects*

19. Our report on *Ageing: Scientific Aspects*, following an inquiry chaired by Lord Sutherland of Houndwood, was published on 21 July 2005. As we noted in last year's *Annual Report*, the Government's response to the report, received in November 2005, was again extremely disappointing, failing either to engage with the strategic vision underlying our report or with the detail of our recommendations.
20. We therefore decided, before publishing a follow-up report or securing a debate on our report, to send the Government response to several of the witnesses to our original inquiry, with an invitation to comment. The comments which we received back were published in a follow-up report in March 2006, in which we noted that "without exception, [the witnesses] share our disappointment, expressing it in sometimes forceful language."<sup>8</sup>
21. Our follow-up report, and the unhappiness it revealed among those involved in researching the ageing process and caring for older people, which received considerable publicity in the media, appeared to galvanise the Government into action. When our reports were debated, in Grand Committee on 5 June 2006, the recently appointed Minister at the Department of Work and Pensions, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, responded far more constructively than his Department had done in the original response, and promised to provide a further response reflecting points made in the debate. This second Government response, published in another follow-up report towards the end of the year, marked a definite step in the right direction. The Government for the first time engaged with the evidence and reasoning that underpinned our recommendations, and showed signs of responding positively to many of them.
22. Thus once again, despite a very poor Government response initially, persistence appears to have paid off. As a Committee we have always sought to achieve continuity in our programme of work, rather than simply publishing reports before moving onto new ground. Instead we seek to maintain pressure on Government through a range of strategies, either by returning to the subjects of earlier report for follow-up inquiries, or by seeking short debates in the House, tabling questions, and so on. The examples we have just described fully vindicate this approach.

*Pandemic Influenza*

23. Our report on *Pandemic Influenza* was published in December 2005, following a short inquiry conducted by the Select Committee itself under the chairmanship of Lord Broers. While we acknowledged that the United Kingdom was relatively well prepared for a possible pandemic caused by the H5N1 influenza virus, we identified several key areas where Government could do more. In particular, we urged the Government to support international efforts, particularly those led by United Nations agencies, to prevent a pandemic; to clarify their policy on the acquisition and use of antiviral drugs; to support the private sector in planning for a pandemic; and to give advance clearance to the research projects that could be of enormous short and long-term value in the event of a pandemic.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ageing: Scientific Aspects—Follow-up* (6th Report, Session 2005–06, HL Paper 146), p. 5.

24. The report was debated on 20 January 2006,<sup>9</sup> and the Government's formal response was published as a Command Paper on 16 February (Cm 6738). Both the response and the Minister's reply to the debate were measured and thoughtful, and showed that the Government continue to plan actively for a possible pandemic. This must be right: while the World Health Organization's threat level remains unchanged, and the rate of human infection has shown little sign of accelerating,<sup>10</sup> H5N1 continues to spread among bird populations, and the possibility of a human influenza pandemic remains higher than at any time since 1968.
25. In October 2006 a report by the Royal Society<sup>11</sup> echoed a number of our key recommendations, for instance that regarding the United Kingdom's stockpile of antiviral drugs. We are delighted that the Society, with the support of experts in the field, has kept up the pressure. There is a danger that the Government, while giving bland assurances that it keeps such key issues "under review", may in reality drop its guard, as other issues emerge into the media spotlight. It is essential that policies continue to develop in line with expert opinion; it is also incumbent upon Parliament to maintain an active scrutiny role, and we therefore look forward to revisiting this issue in the near future.

### *Water Management*

26. In July 2005 we launched Sub-Committee I's inquiry into water management, under the chairmanship of the Earl of Selborne. Our report was published in June 2006, its launch timed to coincide with an important discussion of the key recommendations organised by the Foundation for Science and Technology (for which, see paragraph 50 below). The inquiry came at a time of growing pressure upon water resources in the south and east of England, driven primarily by low rainfall in the short term, but in the long term by population growth, lifestyle changes and climate change. Although in late 2006 the short-term pressure was partially eased by heavier rainfall, the aquifers in southern England remain at a low level and there is still a vital need to plan for the long-term security of water supplies.
27. Such planning will require a "twin-track" approach, balancing resource development and demand management. This is generally agreed. However, our inquiry revealed that nobody in reality was committed to achieving such a balance. On the one hand, the Government and the regulators resist the development of new water supplies, insisting that demand reduction measures be "fully deployed" first (this despite the very long lead times to any project to develop supplies). On the other hand, the water companies appear to predicate their long-term planning largely on resource development, and in many cases have failed to convince regulators or the public of their commitment to reducing demand, either through cutting leakage levels, or promoting greater water efficiency among consumers.
28. Furthermore, the fragmentation of the current regulatory framework militates against a more coherent, balanced approach. Ofwat and the Environment Agency, in particular, need to work more closely with each

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<sup>9</sup> HL Deb., cols. 883–928.

<sup>10</sup> At the time of writing the latest WHO figures (15 January 2007) show 267 confirmed cases worldwide, and 161 fatalities.

<sup>11</sup> *Pandemic Influenza: Science to Policy*, November 2006.

other and with the water companies in developing greater certainty for the water industry, so as to promote long-term planning and investment. We therefore recommended the establishment of regional boards, with wide stakeholder engagement, determining how resource development, leakage reduction, network renewal and demand management could most appropriately be balanced in each area, with the resulting plans guiding Ofwat's funding decisions.

29. We were particularly struck, during our inquiry, by the contrast between the approach to water management here and that in Australia, particularly in Melbourne, which we visited in January. In Australia public awareness of water issues is far in advance of that in the United Kingdom. State governments and municipal authorities are fully aware that water is a precious resource, and are committed to managing it sustainably, for instance through the re-use of waste water and the promotion of water efficiency. They also keep individual consumers fully updated on water levels in reservoirs.
30. Our report was complex and detailed, raising long-term, fundamental issues of policy. Thus while it was disappointing, it was not perhaps surprising, that the Government response, received in August (comfortably within the two-month target), failed to engage fully with our recommendations. As with some other recent Government responses (and as we described in our *Annual Report* for 2005), it contained a lengthy recital of existing policies (most of which we had already acknowledged in our report), and was highly defensive in tone.
31. This defensiveness was echoed in the debate on our report, held on 13 October, in which the Defra Minister, Lord Rooker, spent too much time defending the Department for Communities and Local Government (formerly the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister—now, after another name change, known simply as Communities and Local Government), against the accusation that they failed to take water supplies into account when planning new housing in the south east of England, rather than actually addressing the substantive recommendations in our report.
32. Nevertheless, on 30 January 2007 the Government began to act on one of our key recommendations. A consultation, launched by Defra, invited comments on draft proposals that would make it easier for water companies in water stressed areas to seek authority to impose compulsory metering on consumers as part of their long-term water resource management plans. Crucially, decisions on which areas are “water stressed” will be made by the Environment Agency. The press release announcing the consultation specifically cited our report.<sup>12</sup>
33. In addition, we received responses from the economic regulator of the water industry, Ofwat, and from Water UK, which represents the water companies. These were reprinted, alongside the Government response, in a follow-up report in January 2007.<sup>13</sup> Both were much more positive in tone than the Government response, and have also begun to bear fruit—for instance, Ofwat has launched a review of the concept of “economic level of leakage”, which we recommended should be replaced with a broader “sustainable level

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<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2007/070130a.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> *Water Management: Follow-up*, 2nd Report, Session 2006–07, HL Paper 21.

of leakage”, reflecting environmental and social, as well as economic, factors. We are therefore optimistic that our report, by focusing attention on the key long-term issues, and making recommendations that command broad support from stakeholders, will, despite the Government’s initial reluctance, have a significant influence on the future of water management.

### *Science and Heritage*

34. Sub-Committee II’s inquiry into science and heritage, chaired by Baroness Sharp of Guildford, was launched in December 2005, and reported in November 2006. Unusually, addressed an area where science and the humanities overlap—in particular, what we termed “heritage science”, the diverse range of scientific research which both supports the preservation of our heritage, and also, when juxtaposed with the humanities research that sets the historical and cultural context, can contribute hugely to public understanding of and engagement with that heritage.
35. The risk facing heritage science is the same as that affecting any cross-cutting subject—that of falling between two stools, in this case of being regarded as part of neither the sciences nor the humanities. This risk is compounded by the small size of the sector, with no more than around 30 scientists directly employed by museums and galleries, and an unknown number of university-based researchers in mainstream science departments, reliant wholly on project funding in responsive mode to maintain their interest in heritage. And at the highest level, in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, we found indifference, not only to heritage science, but to the whole issue of conservation, which is invisible both in Departmental objectives and in the Public Sector Agreements which govern funding arrangements for the sector.
36. At the time of going to press the Government response had just been published (31 January 2007). We look forward to debating these issues further in the House.

### *Science Teaching in Schools*

37. Our short inquiry into science teaching in schools, conducted by the Select Committee in June and July 2006, was a follow-up to two previous inquiries: our major report of the 1999–2000 session, *Science and Society*, which included a chapter on science education, and a shorter follow-up in 2001, *Science in Schools*. Despite the time that has passed, and the undoubted efforts of the Government to improve the standard of science teaching (which include ambitious targets to raise the take-up of A-level physics, chemistry and mathematics), the number of pupils aged 16–18 taking all sciences remains more or less flat, while the decline in physics continues. This could have a grave knock-on effect on higher education, and on the future supply of the able scientists who are so essential to the country’s long-term well-being.
38. The focus of our recommendations was on teaching and teachers: on incentives to attract and retain able and well-qualified teachers to the profession; on encouraging continuing professional development; on developing better career opportunities not just for teachers, but for the technicians who support them; and on the future of practical science in the classroom, which appears to be threatened both by poor quality facilities and by a prevailing ethos of “teaching to the test”. More broadly, however, we felt obliged to confront the issue of the A-level syllabus, and the requirement

on students to specialise from the age of 16, which inevitably generates an incentive to opt for “easier” subjects rather than the “harder” sciences. We therefore urged the Government to revisit Sir Mike Tomlinson’s recommendations for a broad diploma-based syllabus, as well as the possibility of adopting the International Baccalaureate (IB).

39. Our report appeared on 5 November. On 30 November the Prime Minister, in a speech to the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust Annual Conference, announced the Government’s intention that there should be “at least one sixth form college or school in every local authority offering students the choice of the IB”.<sup>14</sup> This would mean around 100 extra schools and colleges offering the IB by 2010, as against the 46 state schools and colleges that currently offer it. At the same time, he envisaged that the majority of pupils “will continue to do A-levels and GCSEs”. The Government response, received at the end of the year, repeated the Prime Minister’s points in substance, and also drew attention to the Government’s continuing intention to introduce specialised diplomas for pupils aged 14–19, to sit alongside A levels (and, presumably, the IB in due course), from 2008.
40. The Government response as a whole was thoughtful and positive. However, reviewing the various developments in the crucial area of the syllabus, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Government policy is in flux—arguably, in confusion. We look forward to pursuing these issues in debate later in 2007.

### The impact of our work

#### *Influencing Parliament and public opinion*

41. Our primary task is to report to the House on matters of interest to Parliament within the field of science and technology. In so doing we seek to inform and influence debate within the House, and so contribute to parliamentary scrutiny of Government. However, as we noted in our *Annual Report for 2005*, while it is easy to point to the number of reports published in the course of the year, it is much harder to measure how successful we have been in influencing the House’s scrutiny function.
42. Four major reports were debated in 2006, three on the floor of the House, one in Grand Committee. Of the three debates taken in the House, two were held on Fridays, the third late on a Thursday—the least attractive times for debate. While the debate on *Ageing: Scientific Aspects* took place in “prime time” on a Monday afternoon, the fact that it was held in Grand Committee in the Moses Room inevitably lowered its profile among Members of the House and the media.
43. Despite these handicaps, the four debates attracted a total of 47 speakers. It is hard to escape the conclusion that, were more favourable times to be made available for debates in the Chamber on important and topical reports, whether by this Committee or others, the number of participants would be much greater. **It is now five years since the Leader’s Group on the Working Practices of the House, chaired by the late Lord Williams of Mostyn, recommended that “more debates on select committee reports and on general topics be held in prime time on the floor of the**

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<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page10514.asp>.

**House.”<sup>15</sup> It is extremely disappointing that the “usual channels” have yet to implement this recommendation. We urge them to think again.**

44. It is still more difficult to measure impact upon the wider world, whether on Government, the media or public opinion. Such impact may be manifested in the acceptance of specific recommendations by Government, or, more nebulously, in press coverage and the stimulation of wider public debate.
45. Insofar as press coverage may be considered a measure of impact, 2006 was undoubtedly a successful year. Several of our reports generated considerable publicity in both print and broadcast media, particularly those on *Water Management* and *Science Teaching in Schools*. *Water Management*, for instance, was the subject of 17 items in the national press in the days immediately preceding and following publication, while on the day of publication itself, 6 June, there were some 18 articles in local and regional newspapers. The report’s publication was also extensively covered on radio and television, and interviews with the Earl of Selborne featured on, among others, BBC television news, ITN News, Channel 4 News, GMTV, Sky News, the Radio 4 Today Programme, and Radio 5, not to mention on numerous local radio stations.
46. Our highly critical follow-up report to *Ageing: Scientific Aspects* was also widely reported when it appeared in March, a fact that may have played its part in persuading the Government to engage more thoughtfully with our recommendations by the time of the debate in June.
47. In all our relations with the press we are supported by, in addition to our full-time committee staff, a press officer from the House of Lords Information Office who is attached to the Committee Office, and supports all the House’s Select Committees. In the case of our new inquiry into personal Internet security, he has co-ordinated a more proactive engagement with the media and the public, arranging and informal briefing for journalists, and issuing regular press releases timed to coincide with public meetings. This approach seems to be paying dividends, with a number of reports of meetings appearing in both mainstream and specialised press, as well as in blogs and other informal settings.
48. Publicity, however, is of value only if it helps us to shape public opinion, so adding an extra dimension to the influence that Parliament can bring to bear on Government. Attempts to increase the publicity given to Select Committee reports thus have to go hand in hand with improvements in the quality of the engagement between committees and those who have a direct stake in the outcomes of specific inquiries. Developments in this area are discussed in the next section.

### *Influencing stakeholders*

49. Select Committee reports are of course evidence-based: the issuing of invitations to submit evidence, and the examination of witnesses at public meetings in Westminster, will remain fundamental elements of our work. In addition, we have for many years been accustomed to launching our inquiries with informal seminars, giving a wide range of experts and stakeholders the opportunity to discuss key issues with us at a formative stage of our

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<sup>15</sup> Session 2001–02, HL Paper 111, paragraph 26.

deliberations. In 2006, however, we also sought to involve witnesses and other stakeholders more actively in debating our reports after publication, so as to engage their support in pressing Government to respond positively to our recommendations.

50. One such event was timed to coincide with the launch of our report on *Water Management* on 6 June. The same evening a meeting to discuss the report, organised by the Foundation for Science and Technology, was held at the Royal Society.<sup>16</sup> The report was introduced by the Earl of Selborne, who chaired our inquiry, and there were then comments by representatives of the two principal regulators (Mr Philip Fletcher, Chairman of Ofwat, and Dr David King, of the Environment Agency), as well as a senior figure from the industry, Mr Paul Butler, Managing Director of Mid-Kent Water. All the speakers, who were given advance copies of the report under embargo, welcomed it and endorsed the thrust of our recommendations. Similar views were expressed in the informal discussion that followed.
51. We have already expressed our disappointment at the Government's response to *Water Management*. The responses from Ofwat and Water UK, which represents the industry, on the other hand, were much more positive, echoing the tone of the discussions at the Royal Society. And these words have begun to be translated into action—we have already noted that Ofwat has initiated a review of the “economic level of leakage”. Government departments are, on the other hand, more slow-moving, but we have no doubt that the impact of the active engagement by stakeholders with our recommendations will, over time, be felt at Governmental level also.
52. Our approach to *Science and Heritage* was more focused, reflecting the smaller size of the sector. A week after the report was launched we organised a private and informal seminar in the House of Lords, to which key stakeholders, most of whom had given evidence in the course of our inquiry, were invited. The lead department, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, also sent a representative to observe the event.
53. There was a warm welcome for our report at the seminar. Indeed, it was hard to escape the conclusion that our inquiry, by focusing attention on a hitherto neglected field of activity, had already had a galvanising effect, encouraging discussion and collaboration between stakeholders. At the time of writing we have yet to receive the formal Government response, but there are encouraging signs from within the heritage sector. Key players, such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council, English Heritage, and the Institute of Conservation, already appear to be acting on our recommendations on their own initiative. We trust that the Government will use their influence to encourage such developments, not hold them back.
54. In summary, we look forward in 2007 to continuing to develop ways to increase the impact of our reports, by engaging more proactively with those most concerned with delivering our recommendations.

### *Influencing Government*

55. In our *Annual Report for 2005* we were highly critical of the poor quality of Government responses—a problem affecting many Select Committees across both Houses. We concluded that “the poor standard of recent Government

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<sup>16</sup> A summary of the meeting can be found at <http://www.foundation.org.uk/>.



responses throws into question the seriousness with which departments take Parliamentary, and specifically Select Committee, scrutiny". We called on the Cabinet Office to review its guidance (known as the "Osmotherley Rules") to departments regarding responses.

56. Following the publication of our *Annual Report*, our Chairman held a private meeting with the then Science Minister, Lord Sainsbury of Turville, at which our concerns were discussed in more detail. The Minister made the point, which we fully accept, that when Committees publish detailed and often cross-cutting reports on major issues, Government are not normally able to agree and announce changes to policy within the two months allowed for responses. At the same time he expressed his belief that Select Committee reports did in many cases influence Government policy, often over longer timescales. We agree, and have sought in this *Annual Report* to give examples of such long-term influence, and to explore the ways in which it is exercised.
57. However, the fact that two months is very little time to change policy must not be taken as an excuse for poor-quality responses. It is essential that the formal processes underpinning Government's accountability to Parliament are respected, and that every effort is made in responses to engage fully with the Committee's recommendations, and with the evidence and reasoning that support them. Where the Government need more time to consider or consult, they should say so explicitly, rather than simply restating existing policies and rejecting our recommendations, only to do an about-turn a year or two later.
58. Following our Chairman's meeting with Lord Sainsbury, the Government Chief Scientist, Sir David King, wrote on 1 August to Chief Scientific Advisers across Whitehall. He stated that "You need to be fully involved in the drafting of your Departments' responses to relevant Committee (including all S&T Committee reports), to ensure that the responses are evidence-based and of good quality." Where it was not possible to reach a conclusion within the two-month timescale, responses were to "explain why and promise a substantive response in a specified timescale."
59. We warmly welcome Sir David King's letter, which, if acted upon, will go a long way towards meeting our concerns. However, we are uncertain of the status of his letter, and the extent to which it is binding upon departments. **We therefore once again urge the Government to review the Osmotherley Rules, so as to ensure all departments of Government (including those that still do not have Chief Scientific Advisers) are required to follow the general principles articulated by Sir David King.**

## **APPENDIX 1: AIDE-MÉMOIRE ON THE ROLE OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

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The Committee's terms of reference are to consider Science and Technology.

Within this field, the Committee's function is:

- To carry out inquiries into matters with which Parliament ought to be concerned;
- To report to the House.

Reports can be the result of detailed study or, if need be, they can be made without detailed study in order to recommend a subject of urgent importance for debate.

Subjects for inquiry should concern one or more of the following areas:

- Areas where Parliament can help and stimulate the advancement and application of science and technology in the United Kingdom;
- Aspects of science and technology in which the Government are, or should be, involved;
- The work of the statutory bodies involved in science and technology;
- Areas where the interests of the public and the interests of science and technology may possibly conflict;
- Areas where there is a degree of public concern over issues of science and technology.

In choosing subjects, the Committee will be selective; and they will pay special attention to the applications of science and technology, in order to identify issues likely to be of political significance.

The Committee should not:

- Choose subjects where the scientific or technological aspect is clearly subsidiary to other considerations;
- Choose subjects so wide that they are beyond the Committee's capability in terms of time and resources;
- Act as a channel of generalised information and education on science and technology between Parliament and the public.

The Committee should be prepared to look again at these guidelines in light of experience.



## RECENT REPORTS FROM THE HOUSE OF LORDS SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

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Information about the Science and Technology Committee is available on [www.parliament.uk/hlscience/](http://www.parliament.uk/hlscience/), which also provides access to the texts of Reports.

General Parliamentary information is available on [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### **Session 2002–03**

- 1st Report Managing Radioactive Waste: Government Response
- 2nd Report Chips for Everything: Britain's opportunities in a key global market
- 3rd Report What on Earth? The threat to the science underpinning conservation: The Government's response and the Committee's commentary
- 4th Report Fighting Infection
- 5th Report Science and the RDAs: SETting the Regional Agenda

### **Session 2003–04**

- 1st Report Chips for Everything: follow-up
- 2nd Report Science and the RDAs: follow-up
- 3rd Report Science and Treaties
- 4th Report Renewable Energy: Practicalities
- 5th Report Radioactive Waste Management (*follow-up to 3rd Report 1998–99 and 1st Report 2001–02*)

### **Session 2004–05**

- 1st Report Science and Treaties: follow-up
- 2nd Report Radioactive Waste Management: Government Response

### **Session 2005–06**

- 1st Report Ageing: Scientific Aspects
- 2nd Report Energy Efficiency
- 3rd Report Renewable Energy: Practicalities and Energy Efficiency: Government Responses
- 4th Report Pandemic Influenza
- 5th Report Annual Report for 2005
- 6th Report Ageing: Scientific Aspects—Follow-up
- 7th Report Energy: Meeting with Malcolm Wicks MP
- 8th Report Water Management
- 9th Report Science and Heritage
- 10th Report Science Teaching in Schools

### **Session 2006–07**

- 1st Report Ageing: Scientific Aspects—Second Follow-up Report
- 2nd Report Water Management—Follow-up