



House of Commons
Science and Technology
Committee

**The Legacy Report:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Ninth Report of
Session 2009–10**

**First Special Report of Session
2010–11**

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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.

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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 <http://www.parliament.uk/science>
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: Glenn McKee (Clerk); Farrah Bhatti (Committee Specialist); Xameerah Malik (Committee Specialist); Andy Boyd (Senior Committee Assistant); Julie Storey (Committee Assistant); Dilys Tonge (Committee Assistant); Jim Hudson (Committee Support 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

First Special Report

On 31 March 2010 the Science and Technology Committee published its Ninth Report of Session 2009–10, *The Legacy Report* [HC 481]. On 14 July 2010 the Committee received a memorandum from the Government which contained a response to the Report. The memorandum is published as an appendix to this Report.

Appendix: Government response

This Government welcomes the establishment of the Science and Technology Committee to continue the highly valued contribution to Parliamentary scrutiny of science engineering, technology and research across Government. This memorandum provides the Government's response to those aspects of the former Committee's final report, 'The Legacy Report', which relate to Government.

1. Science and technology parliamentary scrutiny

We recommend that in the new Parliament there should be a committee responsible for scrutinising science, engineering and technology across government. We make three suggestions on how this committee should be formed: (1) it should have the prime responsibility for scrutiny of the Government's science unit and science minister, whatever the unit is called and wherever it lies; (2) it should be a freestanding committee with a cross-departmental remit; and (3) it should have a membership of 11 and a quorum of three. (Paragraph 31)

2. The Government notes this recommendation. The third element, the reduction of the membership to 11 and the quorum to three, was implemented as part of the package of reforms recommended by the Select Committee on Reform of the House, with effect from the beginning of the current Parliament.

3. The departmental committee system is both effective and very well regarded. However, the Government also acknowledges the benefits of a cross-cutting approach to scrutiny. Between 1992 and 2007, and again since 2009, the Committee has managed to engage effectively in both cross-cutting and departmental scrutiny, so the current Standing Orders are no obstacle to this. The Committee has been re-established on that basis.

2. Evidence check 1: Early literacy interventions

We were disappointed that the Government failed to engage with our Report on early literacy interventions in a constructive manner. Either our concerns were right and the Government should have explained how it will take steps to improve its processes, or our concerns were misplaced and the Government should explain why. Avoiding important issues is unacceptable. (paragraph 39)

Response provided by the Department for Education

Every Child a Reader (ECaR): Reading Recovery

4. The Government notes the Committee's point on the roll out of Reading Recovery. Whilst it is clear that it is important to invest in early literacy interventions, it is accepted that no cost benefit comparisons with other interventions were carried out prior to rolling out the Reading Recovery element of the ECaR programme. The decision to go with Reading Recovery as part of ECaR was partly driven by the practical issue of scalability and took account of a range of diagnostic evidence.

5. Although the Government will continue to fund the Every Child a Reader programme for this financial year, in large part as a consequence of the Committee's report the Government is now looking into the future structure of catch-up support, which will include reviewing the Reading Recovery element of the ECaR programme and take account of all relevant evidence. The current independent evaluation of ECaR, which will conclude in March 2011, will look at the impact on outcomes at school and pupil level, as well as evaluating the implementation of the roll-out, and value for money.

6. With regard to literacy interventions more generally, through improving the use of systematic synthetic phonics in the teaching of early reading, evidence suggests that this approach should result in more children reading from the start and enable those at risk of failure to make better progress. This would reduce the extent and cost of literacy interventions.

7. As far as the Department for Education is concerned, we are committed to achieving the best value-for-money across our entire education programme. We have a clear process for scrutinising the evidence base underpinning proposed legislation as all Impact Assessments are accompanied by challenge and assessment from our Chief Economist.

8. The Government is also building on work to scrutinise and assess the value for money of existing policies and programmes which do not require legislation as part of the Spending Review process.

9. All of the value for money assessment work includes making estimates of the contribution of policies to our outputs and outcomes.

Low Quality Data

10. The Government notes the Committee's point about the low quality of data. The point raised about the use of reading/spelling age data, as opposed to standardised scores, relates to UK literacy research in general, which is not a matter for Government control. However the Government encourages researchers to collect the best data even though we cannot require this.

Dyslexia

11. The Department did not set its research and policy priorities on the basis of the priorities of lobby groups. The Department's dyslexia policy was based on a range of evidence from a variety of sources. The Department was advised by an expert advisory group whose members included a number of eminent experts from universities with a track record of research and practice in this area.

12. The Government notes the Committee's point on the issues with a definition of Dyslexia. The Expert Advisory Group established by Sir Jim Rose in preparation of his independent report considered many published definitions of dyslexia. They concluded that difficulties of a dyslexic nature can affect children across the range of intellectual abilities. This represents an important shift away from reliance on a discrepancy between measured IQ and measured attainment in reading and spelling once used to identify dyslexia. Evidence shows that, regardless of general level of ability, those with marked reading and spelling difficulties perform badly on tasks such as decoding, word recognition and phonological skills. Furthermore, measures of IQ do not predict how children will respond to literacy intervention or their long-term outcomes.

13. Sir Jim Rose's report concluded that dyslexic difficulties are best thought of as existing on a continuum from mild to severe rather than forming a discrete category. The Report points out that, until recently, a child was deemed either to have or not to have dyslexia. But it is now recognised that there is no sharp dividing line between having a learning difficulty such as dyslexia and not having it. The definition also acknowledges that some individuals with learning difficulties of a dyslexic nature may experience other co-occurring difficulties; and that the severity of a particular learning difficulty can be gauged by the response of the child to good, well-implemented intervention. It was in considering these areas that Sir Jim Rose drew up his definition.

3. Principles on independent scientific advice

We recommend that after the general election the Prime Minister enshrines the principles applying to the treatment of independent scientific advice provided to government in the new Ministerial Code. (Paragraph 61)

14. The Government is committed to evidence-based policy making and this is dependent on getting the best quality advice and evidence. The Government recognises the important contribution of independent science and engineering advice to the development of robust policy, and agrees it is essential the Principles for Scientific Advice to Government be fully embedded in its working practices.

15. The Government is therefore pleased to confirm that the 2010 version of the Ministerial Code references the Principles and makes clear the need to consider them as part of the policy-making process: "*Ministers have a duty to give fair consideration and due weight to informed and impartial advice from civil servants, as well as to other considerations and advice in reaching policy decisions, and should have regard to the Principles for Scientific Advice to Government (Paragraph 5.2).*"