



## House of Commons - Committee Summary - Commons Science and Technology Select Committee

09/05/2018

### Science and Technology Committee

#### Research integrity

8 May 2018

#### Witnesses

- Sam Gyimah, Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Education
- Dr Patrick Vallance, Government Chief Scientific Adviser and Head of Government Science and Engineering Profession, Government Office for Science

#### Overview

The committee heard that universities should be held responsible for the full compliance of upholding standards of research integrity but the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation declined to assert that funding should be dependent on this. Other topics covered included concordant sign up, self-assessment and disclosure in clinical trials.

#### Summary

##### UKRI

Opening the session Sam Gyimah, the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, outlined his vision for research integrity stating that scientific endeavour was based on this. He explained his relationship with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and where research and innovation policies were split between the department and UKRI. He went on to state that there was an opportunity to become better at the different aspects of research and how this could be valued from a taxpayer's point of view and that he was working with the Secretary of State on developing this.

##### Compliance

Gyimah declared that it was not good enough that not all universities were complying with reporting their research output and it was upon UKRI to police this reporting. It was not enough for a university to just have a "webpage" to report on their research, Gyimah asserted and that he would work with Sir Mark Walport to improve this.

Committee chair Norman Lamb (Lib Dem, North Norfolk) probed whether there was any scope for strengthening the concordant to strengthen research integrity. The minister outlined that this was being explored and that he felt it could be strengthened on breaches to improve compliance. He said he aimed for one hundred per cent compliance.

Bill Grant (Con, Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) questioned the panel on how to raise awareness from universities about complying with the concordant. Dr Patrick Vallance, Government Chief Scientific Adviser and Head of Government Science and Engineering Profession stated that this should be dependent on universities applying for funding from UKRI.

Darren Jones (Lab, Bristol North West) suggested that funding be withheld from universities should they fail to be compliant. The minister did not agree with this assertion and suggested a more carrot and stick approach would be better, he noted that UKRI as a new institution needed time to establish its programmes.

### **Self-assessment**

Considering the method of self-assessment in response to some universities never submitting any research integrity criteria, Vallance stated that he felt scientists were committed to stamping out malpractice and so self-assessment did work well in these circumstances. He noted that in cases where universities reported no research integrity, that would cause concern.

On self assessment Vallance asserted that it was in the interest of the individual universities to get this right. He did not agree with Jones' suggestion that self-assessment allowed conflicts of interest to arise. Gyimah added that this was an area that would need consistent attention to ensure the bar was being raised.

High risk research did have external assessments, Vallance noted.

### **Concordant sign up**

In response to Vicky Ford (Con, Chelmsford) on whether universities continued with the integrity from commissioning through to the research process, Vallance explained that there was a big diversity of responses and that he felt government departments should sign up to the existing concordant with a new approach to look at integrity that incorporated more than just commissioning. He added that he had written to all departmental CSAs requesting that they sign up to the concordant.

Vallance went on to praise the CSA as an incredibly important network across government, highlighting the breadth of the scientific disciplines they covered. He added that he was in the process of reviewing the CSA recruitment process and that they looked for CSAs in action not just in titles.

### **Clinical trials**

Martin Whitfield (Lab, East Lothian) probed the panel on their responsibilities to encourage the full disclosure of trials. Vallance asserted that in every case the findings of trials should be made public but warned against imposing rigid timelines on complying with the 2014 guidance. The minister noted the importance for universities to comply with best practice of their own accord.

Ford pressed the minister to agree with the publication of all results of all research trials.

### **Sanctions**

Stephen Metcalfe (Con, South Basildon and East Thurrock) questioned the potential sanctions for those that did not practice research integrity. The minister said that some cases could result in criminal cases but that he was not looking to introduce new criminal laws.

### **Galileo project**

Lamb took the opportunity of the minister's presence to question him on the recent meetings he had had concerning the Galileo project.

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