

# SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

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## PRESS NOTICE

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### OVERHAUL UNIVERSITY FUNDING OR LOSE KEY SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING GRADUATES, SAY MPS

Government must overhaul the way science subjects are funded or risk missing out on key economic goals, the Commons Science and Technology Committee will say in a Report released today, Thursday April 7 2005.

Recently a number of university science departments, notably the chemistry department at Exeter University, have been closed down, putting national provision of science subjects in jeopardy. The MPs point out that science is at the heart of the Government's political and economic agendas, yet numbers of students in the key science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects have been dropping for several years. In order to reverse the decline in students taking up these subjects, the Government urgently needs to address its root cause by tackling the quality of science teaching in schools. Without taking this and other long term measures, MPs believe that departments will continue to close, making it difficult for the Government to realise its economic goals.

The solution that the Committee proposes is radical. Instead of allowing all 130 universities to compete for research and teaching funds in a winner-takes-all system, the Committee wants each university to play to its own particular strengths. The "hub and spokes" model recommended by MPs would reduce the strain on resources by encouraging universities to specialise and to collaborate to ensure the provision of research and teaching in all the core science subjects at a regional level.

The main barrier to the implementation of the Committee's recommendations is the universities themselves. If the hub and spokes model is to work, they will have to set aside their own interests in order to collaborate. Forcing them to do so would undermine their autonomy. But MPs say that the Government already influences the decisions that universities make through its control of the purse strings, and that it could use similar means to encourage them to work together.

Ian Gibson MP, Chair of the Committee said "There have already been too many closures of university science departments. The Government can't keep papering over the cracks and hoping that this problem will go away. A radical solution is needed. The Government needs to bang the heads of Vice-Chancellors together until they start looking beyond their own doorsteps to the wider national interest. Otherwise it can kiss goodbye to its economic goals."

## Notes for Editors

- For more information or to arrange bids for the Chairman, Ian Gibson MP, please call Jessica Bridges-Palmer on 0207 219 0718 or 07849 737 349.
- Under the terms of Standing Order No. 152 the Committee is empowered to examine the “expenditure, policy and administration of the Office of Science and Technology and its associated public bodies. The Committee was appointed on 12 November 2001.
- The Committee announced this inquiry on 21 December 2004 in press notice No 12 of Session 2004-05. Four evidence sessions were held: Monday 7 February, when evidence was heard from university students, the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE); Monday 28 February, when evidence was heard from Research Councils UK (RCUK), the Office of Science and Technology (OST), RDAs and the Association for University Research and Industry Links (AURIL); Wednesday 2 March, when evidence was heard from learned societies and the Association of University Teachers (AUT); and Wednesday 9 March when evidence was heard from University Vice-Chancellors and the Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, Department for Education and Skills.
- The Report will be available on the Committee website on the day of publication at [www.parliament.uk/s&tcom](http://www.parliament.uk/s&tcom)  
Bound printed copies of the Report will be obtainable from TSO outlets and from the Parliamentary Bookshop, 12 Bridge Street, Parliament Square, London SW1A 2JX (020 7219 3890), from **Monday 11 April 2005** by quoting the appropriate HC number.

## Membership of the Committee

Dr Ian Gibson	(Lab, Norwich North) (Chairman)	Mr Tony McWalter	(Lab, Hemel Hempstead)
Paul Farrelly	(Lab, Newcastle-under-Lyme)	Dr Andrew Murrison	(Con, Westbury)
Dr Evan Harris	(Lib Dem, Oxford West & Abingdon)	Geraldine Smith	(Lab, Morecambe and Lunesdale)
Kate Hoey	(Lab, Vauxhall)	Bob Spink	(Con, Castle Point)
Dr Brian Iddon	(Lab, Bolton South East)	Dr Desmond Turner	(Lab, Brighton Kemptown)
Mr Robert Key	(Con, Salisbury)		