

3rd April 2012

Dear Dr Graham Spittle CBE,

Response to call for evidence: Postgraduate education inquiry

The Science Council welcomes the opportunity to input to this valuable project on a topic that is of keen interest to our member bodies.

Background

The Science Council is a growing umbrella organisation and currently has 37 learned societies and professional body members drawn from across science and its applications: a list of member organisations is attached.

In addition to providing a mechanism for the sector to work collectively, the Science Council develops and leads collaborative projects working with member bodies and the wider scientific community: examples include the Future Morph¹ web site designed to provide information about careers opportunities, and LMI analysis of the UK Science Workforce.²

The Science Council also works to advance the professional practice of science and since 2004 has awarded the professional qualification of Chartered Scientist (CSci). It is now leading an initiative that aims to raise the profile, aspirations and retention of technician and graduate scientists by developing new professional registers at these levels (Registered Scientist and Registered Science Technician); these were launched early in 2012.

Collectively our member bodies represent more than 400,000 individual members, including scientists, teachers and senior executives in industry, academia and the public sector.

A number of our member bodies will be submitting individual responses to the inquiry giving greater detail on the issues relevant to their specific disciplines and areas of operation. For that reason this short response is concerned only with overarching concerns common to a number of bodies.

Key Issues

International competitiveness

The number of international students pursuing postgraduate study in the UK has been increasing steadily over recent years and the income and critical mass generated is crucial for maintaining the viability of these specialised courses across science and technology disciplines. However, the impact of current immigration policy restrictions is reducing access to the courses and threatens the sustainability of many of them. The Science Council is also concerned that the restrictive immigration policy will begin to inhibit global collaboration and knowledge sharing, leading

¹ www.futuremorph.org

² <http://www.sciencecouncil.org/content/science-workforce>

to serious implications for the UK's central position and global leadership in many areas of scientific endeavour.

Member bodies also report concern that UK postgraduate students are less well prepared for research careers and are failing to compete with international applicants for research positions.

Funding for postgraduate courses

Taught Masters courses are fast becoming the preferred route into science and technical areas of employment and to doctoral study. However, the funding model for these courses means that there is a risk that some sub-disciplines with small numbers of students could disappear. In some sectors where there is an ageing population of skilled people the disappearance of these courses could lead to near-total loss of national capacity in the next few years.

In addition a number of the Research Councils that have provided significant levels of funding for taught Masters courses and studentships in previous years are now discontinuing their support in a number of critical and strategically important research areas. This and other measures, including a concentration on fewer strategic initiatives is likely to impact negatively on the take-up of PhD studentships. We would point to the decision by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council to halt studentship funding in all disciplines except statistics and applied probability, and the decision by the Natural Environment Research Council to discontinue funding for nearly 400 full-time studentships or equivalent from 2012 as examples of where short-term decisions will have long-term impacts on the ability of the UK to strengthen our research base and attract global talent.

Accordingly, our members consider that the funding for these courses would be better routed through the Higher Education Funding Council for England and that the definition for Strategically Important and Vulnerable subjects at the postgraduate level should differ from that used at undergraduate level through the consideration of the learning outcomes of courses.

System equilibrium

The issues with funding for Masters and PhD places are of particular concern at a time where the changes to funding for undergraduate courses could well deter students from continuing their studies. The implementation of the Higher Education White Paper and the reforms to the way that higher education will be funded in future year's means that the system is undergoing a considerable amount of change in a short space of time, meaning the consequences are very hard to predict. It would be sensible to avoid too many additional changes until the impacts are clear, particularly in relation to student choices.

I hope that you find this input helpful and I would be happy to discuss further any of the issues outlined above.

Yours sincerely,



Diana Garnham
Chief Executive

**Member Bodies of the Science Council
February 2012**

1. Association for Clinical Biochemistry*
2. Association of Neurophysiological Scientists*
3. Association for Science Education**
4. British Academy of Audiology
5. BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT*
6. British Psychological Society*
7. Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management*
8. Energy Institute*
9. Geological Society of London*
10. Institute of Biomedical Science*
11. Institute of Brewing and Distilling*
12. Institute of Clinical Research*
13. Institute of Corrosion*
14. Institute of Food Science and Technology*
15. Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology*
16. Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining*
17. Institute of Mathematics and its Applications*
18. Institute of Measurement and Control*
19. Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine*
20. Institute of Physics
21. Institute of Professional Soil Scientists*
22. Institute of Science and Technology
23. Institution of Chemical Engineers*
24. Institution of Environmental Sciences*
25. London Mathematical Society
26. Mineralogical Society*
27. Nuclear Institute*
28. Oil and Colour Chemists' Association*
29. Physiological Society
30. Royal Astronomical Society
31. Royal Meteorological Society
32. Royal Society of Chemistry*
33. Royal Statistical Society
34. Society for General Microbiology
35. Society of Biology
36. Society for Cardiological Science and Technology
37. Society of Dyers & Colourists

* Licensed to award Chartered Scientist – CSci

** Licensed to award Chartered Science Teacher - CSciTeach