



## UPDATE TO THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEES

### ISSUE

1. On 25<sup>th</sup> June the Office of Science and Innovation launched a consultation to invite views from interested parties on the Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees<sup>1</sup>, Annex 1.

### BACKGROUND

2. This Code of Practice was last revised in 2001 and is intended to provide guidance for scientific advisory committees and their secretariats. This guidance is specifically focused on the operation of scientific advisory committees, their relationship with government departments and the implementation of the Guidelines on Scientific Analysis in Policy Making, October 2005<sup>2</sup>.
3. In November 2006, the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee's report on 'Scientific Advice, Risk and Evidence Based Policy Making'<sup>3</sup> was published as a result of a major inquiry into the Government's scientific advisory system. This inquiry, launched as a result of perceived loss of public confidence in the scientific advice system supporting Government policy making, investigated the sources of advice and expertise used by Government, the evidence base and transparency of policy making and risk and public communication.
4. The report made 14 specific recommendations relating to scientific advisory committees including an update the Code of Practice, to help restore public confidence in the integrity of the policy making process and to improve the policy making process. These 14 recommendations are in Annex 1 of the consultation document. The consultation is aimed primarily at addressing these recommendations rather than completely rewriting the Code.

1. <http://www.dti.gov.uk/files/file39981.pdf>

2. <http://www.dti.gov.uk/files/file9767.pdf>

3. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmsctech/900/900-i.pdf>

5. This consultation draft of the Code is based on a principle based approach and seeks to put more emphasis on the use of all forms of evidence. It aims to ensure that
  - Key decision makers can be confident that evidence is robust and stands up to challenges of credibility, reliability and objectivity
  - Key decision makers can be confident that the advice derived from the analysis of evidence stands up to these challenges
  - The public is aware and confident that these steps are being taken

## **KEY ISSUES**

6. Key issues for SEAC to consider in the Code consultation are :
  - Lay membership of scientific advisory committees. The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee's report requested clarity on the role of lay members on scientific committees and did not advocate their use as a routine.
  - The option of inviting key experts to meetings on an adhoc basis as an alternative to increasing committee membership.
  - Quality assurance of scientific advisory committees.

## **ADVICE SOUGHT FROM THE COMMITTEE**

7. The committee is requested to review the Code of Practice and respond to the consultation questions on pages 6 and 7 of the consultation document. These questions incorporate the key issues described above.
8. The secretariat will draft a formal SEAC response to this consultation.



**Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees**

<http://www.dti.gov.uk/files/file39981.pdf>