

Russell Group response to the Science and Technology Committee's inquiry into Government Horizon Scanning

1. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Science and Technology Select Committee's inquiry into Government horizon scanning.
2. The purpose of The Russell Group is to provide strategic direction, policy development and communications for the 24 major research-intensive universities in the UK; we aim to ensure that policy development in a wide range of issues relating to higher education is underpinned by a robust evidence base and a commitment to civic responsibility, improving life chances, raising aspirations and contributing to economic prosperity and innovation.
3. The research-intensive universities represented by the Russell Group can play a key role in advising the Government on potential threats, risks and other emerging issues by providing expertise and a strong evidence base for future policy decisions. Russell Group universities include world-leading experts across almost every field of academic endeavour and they have the critical mass of internationally competitive research, talent, infrastructure and resources needed to generate new ideas, innovations and inventions on which wider social and economic impacts are founded. The Government should be mindful of the possibility to consult these experts and to tap into this world-class research to underpin its horizon scanning work, not just in central government, but across all Departments, Agencies and Devolved Administrations.
4. Increasingly, there is a role for social sciences in addressing many of the key policy challenges faced by Government and the more research-intensive universities are well placed to provide advice in these areas as well as in science, technology, engineering and medical fields etc. where horizon scanning for risks is more established.
5. University academics are already consulted by the Government in many areas, but, outside of the formal structure of Departmental science advisory councils, input is often sought on a more informal and *ad hoc* basis. Typically Government officials may contact academics who are already known to them or who are within their own network of contacts rather than the academic(s) who may be the leading expert on a particular subject.
6. Our proposal for improving this would be to collate a contact list of senior academics, along with their subject specialisms, who would be willing to give advice and engage with the Government, thus making it more apparent who would be the most relevant and appropriate individual(s) and groups to contact according to need. The up-coming Research Excellence Framework (REF) provides an excellent opportunity for an up to date listing such as this to be created by the Government, in particular as this will highlight the areas where UK research is world-leading.
7. An accessible list of contacts would also help to address one of the key criticisms in Jon Day's report on horizon scanning: the need to share networks of expert advice across

Departments to offer alternative perspectives and robust challenge. This is particularly important where a multi-disciplinary view is required.

8. Whilst the Committee is focusing on horizon scanning, which typically means the assessment of longer-term opportunities and risks (Jon Day's report defined the timescale as 'beyond the Parliamentary term'), it could also be useful to have a directory of identified experts with security pre-clearance who could be called together at short-notice to deal with emergencies or situations demanding an especially short time-frame. We understand that the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser is interested in developing such a directory and we suggest that this could be considered alongside work to develop the horizon scanning network of contacts.

Russell Group

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