



HOUSE OF LORDS

Science and
Technology
Committee

The House of Lords is an essential part of the UK Parliament. Its committees investigate public policy, proposed laws and government activity. The remit of the Science and Technology Committee is ‘to consider science and technology’.

Background and role

Why it was set up

The committee was set up in 1979 to look at science and technology issues and, where problems have been identified, to report to the House of Lords with recommendations for government action.

What it does

It investigates:

- public policy areas which are, or ought to be, informed by scientific research
- technological challenges and opportunities
- public policy towards science itself.

How it does its work

Investigations are carried out by the select committee. Additional members are sometimes ‘co-opted’ if they have a particular interest in the subject matter of the inquiry or relevant knowledge or experience.

The committee publishes about two or three reports a year, including some shorter ‘follow-up’ reports which address developments since the original report was published.



Find out about the committee's latest work at www.parliament.uk/hlscience

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Membership

The committee has 14 members, including scientists as well as other professionals with relevant experience in industry, politics and academia.



Science and Technology Committee chairman
Lord Patel

Members

Lord Patel (chairman)

Doctor of medicine and clinical scientist

Lord Borwick

Trustee of the British Lung Foundation

Lord Fox

Former engineer

Lord Griffiths of Fforestfach

Former head of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit

Lord Hunt of Chesterton

Climate expert and former chief executive of the Met Office

Lord Kakkar

Professor of surgery

Lord Mair

Geotechnical engineer

Lord Maxton

Former MP

Baroness Morgan of Huyton

Former chair of Ofsted

Baroness Neville-Jones

Former chair, Joint Intelligence Committee

Lord Oxburgh

Geologist and geophysicist

Lord Renfrew of Kaimsthorn

Archaeologist

Lord Vallance of Tummel

Businessman

Baroness Young of Old Scone

Former chief executive of Diabetes UK

Investigations and reports

Connected and Autonomous Vehicles: The Future

The Science and Technology Committee report, 'Connected and autonomous vehicles: The future', was published in March 2017. The inquiry collected evidence on the potential uses and benefits of connected and autonomous vehicles (CAV). It recommended that the government should make policy and investment decisions to enable the UK to get the best economic benefit from CAV.



Benefits to all sectors

The committee said that the government must broaden its focus so that its work on CAV cuts across all sectors and does not focus so heavily on road vehicles. Early benefits are likely to come in sectors such as marine and agriculture. It must not allow media attention around driverless cars to distract from the many potential benefits that CAV can provide outside the roads sector.

Sharing knowledge

The report finds that there is no clear central coordination of strategy or information sharing across the different sectors that could benefit from CAV technology, or robotics. It suggests the government takes steps to ensure that expertise and knowledge is shared across sectors. These include the establishment of a Robotics and Autonomous Systems (RAS) Leadership Council as soon as possible to play a key role in developing the strategy for CAV.

Social and behavioural questions

The main social, behavioural and ethical questions relating to autonomous cars remain largely unanswered, such as whether they will reduce accidents caused by human error. The government should give priority to commissioning and encouraging research studying behavioural questions and ensure it is an integral part of any trials it funds.

Next steps

The report recommends that the government prepares for the deployment of fully automated road vehicles. This should include one or more large scale testing environments covering real world urban and rural environments.

The committee concludes that the government should continue to invest in the fundamental scientific research in robotics and information technology that underpins CAV.

EU membership and UK science

Key findings in the committee's April 2016 report on the influence of EU membership on UK science include:

Science funding

The committee heard that:

- the UK is one of the EU's top performers in securing funding and it bestows significant value to UK science
- nearly 18.3 per cent of the UK's funding from the EU goes on scientific research and development.

Business funding

The committee raised concerns over the poor level of engagement by large businesses in securing EU funding. The UK is below the EU average and lagging behind competitors such as Germany and France in these areas and, given that 64% of UK research and development is conducted by business, this is a serious failing.

Collaboration

During its investigation the committee heard that collaborative opportunities are perhaps the most significant benefit that EU membership affords UK science and research, but noted that the USA and Australia are two of the UK's top five collaborative partners.

Freedom of movement

The committee heard of the advantage free movement of researchers and scientists between the UK and the rest of the EU brings to UK science. The report argued every effort should be made to preserve this key benefit.

Brexit

The committee looked at alternatives to EU membership, for example becoming an 'associated country' still involved with EU projects and receiving EU funds, but said the UK may no longer have the same level of influence. It concludes that further investigation on how Brexit will impact UK science is needed and since the referendum result it has engaged in follow-up activity to continue its work on the subject.



Find out more

Contact us or go online for information about business, membership and outreach activities.

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