

Sir Jeremy Heywood
Secretary of the Cabinet & Head of the Civil Service
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From the President Venki Ramakrishnan

25 May 2017

Dear Sir Jeremy

We are aware that some within the research community have written to you raising concerns about impediments to the ability of independent researchers to discuss evidence during the pre-election period. We have seen your reply to the Science Media Centre and agree on the importance of the principles behind the restrictions of the pre-election period. However, there remains a sense that there are problems with how those restrictions are being implemented and we want to lend our voice to those calling for greater clarity both now and for future campaign periods.

As you will appreciate, the urgent needs and actions of business, society and science are not put on pause during an election period and the need for evidence based decision making is not put to one side. People will still seek to understand what is happening in the world and researchers can help provide informed insight. If independent researchers live in fear of a backlash from funders or other parties for simply laying out the evidence on the issues of the day, we are doing a disservice to the public.

We welcome your reassurance that the principles are not about restricting commentary from independent academics but we hope you will be able to take action to reassure all researchers who are not directly employed in government. They can and indeed should, continue to support informed discussion. Such scientists may not always work in universities. Rather, they may even be employed directly by research councils, e.g. scientists at the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology or the Rutherford-Appleton Laboratory. Others may work for entities like the Francis Crick Institute or the Diamond Light Source, which although constituted as autonomous entities receive a great deal of their funding directly from the government. Given the timing, we suggest that in the post-election analysis of the operation of these rules, a key factor should be to clarify these rules for the research community. We are happy to contribute to such an analysis if necessary.

Yours sincerely,



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