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Guidance

# Principles of scientific advice to government

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The 'Principles of scientific advice' set out the rules of engagement between government and those who provide independent scientific and engineering advice. They provide a foundation on which independent scientific advisers and government departments should base their operations and interactions.

The principles apply to ministers and government departments, all members of Scientific Advisory Committees and Councils (the membership of which often includes statisticians, social researchers and lay members) and other independent scientific and engineering advice to government. They do not apply to employed advisers, departmental Chief Scientific Advisers or other civil servants who provide scientific or analytical advice, as other codes of professional conduct apply.

## 1. Clear roles and responsibilities

- government should respect and value the academic freedom, professional status and expertise of its independent scientific advisers
- scientific advisers should respect the democratic mandate of the government to take decisions based on a wide range of factors and recognise that science is only part of the evidence that government must consider in developing policy
- government and its scientific advisers should not act to undermine mutual trust
- chairs of Scientific Advisory Committees and Councils have a particular responsibility to maintain open lines of communication with their sponsor department and its ministers

## 2. Independence

- scientific advisers should be free from political interference with their work
- scientific advisers are free to publish and present their research
- scientific advisers are free to communicate publicly their advice to government, subject to normal confidentiality restrictions, including when it appears to be inconsistent with government policy
- scientific advisers have the right to engage with the media and public independently of the government and should seek independent media advice on substantive pieces of work
- scientific advisers should make clear in what capacity they are communicating

## 3. Transparency and openness

- scientific advice to government should be made publicly available unless there are over-riding reasons, such as national security or the facilitation of a crime, for not doing so
- any requirement for independent advisers to sign non-disclosure agreements, for example for reasons of national security, should be publicly acknowledged and regularly reviewed



- the timing of the publication of independent scientific advice is a matter for the advisory body but should be discussed with the government beforehand
- government should not prejudge the advice of independent advisers, nor should it criticise advice or reject it before its publication
- the timing of the government's response to scientific advice should demonstrably allow for proper consideration of that advice
- government should publicly explain the reasons for policy decisions, particularly when the decision is not consistent with scientific advice and in doing so, should accurately represent the evidence
- if government is minded not to accept the advice of a Scientific Advisory Committee or Council the relevant minister should normally meet with the chair to discuss the issue before a final decision is made, particularly on matters of significant public interest

## 4. Applying the principles

Scientific Advisory Committees, Councils and government departments should consider the extent to which the principles in this document are reflected in their operation and to make changes as necessary. Issues relating to the function and working of scientific advisory bodies that are not reflected in these high-level principles are discussed in more detailed guidance such as the '[Code of practice for Scientific Advisory Committees](#)'

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scientific-advisory-committees-code-of-practice>) or the 'Guidelines on scientific analysis in policy-making'.

Government departments and their independent scientific advisers should raise issues of concern over the application of the principles, or other guidance, with the relevant departmental Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA). If the matter of concern cannot be effectively resolved or is especially serious CSAs should approach the Government Chief Scientific Adviser (GCSA) and ministers should approach the GCSA and the Minister for Science. The matter will be examined against a clear set of criteria, which include a breach of the Principles or CoPSAC.

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