



Cabinet Office

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Fiona Fox
Science Media Centre
215 Euston Road
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Dear Fiona

I am writing in response to your letter dated 17 May 2017, on the subject of pre-election guidance and its application to the scientific community.

The long-established principles underpinning the pre-election guidance are designed to maintain the impartiality of the Civil Service, ensure the appropriate use of official resources, and avoid competing with parliamentary candidates for the attention of the public during the election campaign. It is therefore appropriate that public bodies are subject to restrictions on their public activity during this period of sensitivity. As such, staff members of NDPBs should not comment publicly on politically controversial matters, or proactively contribute to debates on high profile issues during this time.

However, the principles are not, and have never been about restricting commentary from independent academics. The guidance also makes clear that essential government business should continue.

It is for individual public bodies to apply the principles of the pre-election guidance within their organisations. Research Councils UK (RCUK) have produced their own supplementary guidelines, providing more specific advice about how the restrictions of this period affect their community. The RCUK guidelines make it clear that Research Council-funded researchers wishing to comment during the election period should do so under their university affiliation rather than the Research Councils. This is consistent with central guidance.

It is standard practice, after an election, for the Cabinet Office to reflect on how the election guidance has operated in practice, and we will be doing so this time round. I do not believe a wider review or consultation is required.



If you have specific instances of where you feel the principles of the pre-election guidance have been improperly applied, I suggest that you contact Sue Gray, Director General, Propriety and Ethics in the Cabinet Office, who can be contacted on proprietyandethicsteam@cabinetoffice.gov.uk.



Jeremy Heywood

