

Prime Minister's Council for Science and Technology: Ways of working

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Purpose

The Council for Science and Technology (CST) is responsible for providing independent advice to the Prime Minister and Cabinet on strategic science, engineering, technology and innovation issues that cut across the responsibilities of individual government departments.

CST was established in 1993 as the government's top-level advisory body on science and technology.

Function

CST provides impartial and evidence-based advice to the Prime Minister and Cabinet on:

- a. what the government's high-level priorities for science and technology should be to deliver the government's national missions;
- b. emerging and long-term scientific and technological developments, including opportunities and risks relating to:
 - i. science and research capability
 - ii. innovation and economic growth
 - iii. health and quality of life within the UK
 - iv. sustainable development and resilience
- c. how science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) can be developed and sustained in the UK (e.g., through skills and international partnerships);
- d. the UK's science and innovation system, including issues relating to UK research, development, and innovation institutions;
- e. other matters requested by the Prime Minister, ministers, or considered important by the Council; and
- f. topics requested by the Science and Technology Cabinet Committee.

Appointment to CST

The Prime Minister appoints and reappoints members to CST. Appointments and reappointments are made in accordance with the '[Governance code for public appointments](#)'¹. The Presidents of the four National Academies are appointed as ex-officio members of CST.

The term of CST membership is usually 3 years. Either party can terminate the appointment early by giving 3 months' notice, in writing. If, during the term of the appointment to CST, it is dissolved, wound up or abolished; or it is reorganised or merged with another body or there is a material increase or reduction in its functions, the appointment will terminate automatically with effect from the date of such dissolution, winding up, abolition reorganisation, merger, increase or reduction in function, or such other date as is specified in any relevant legislation.

The appointment will be terminated immediately should the appointee be guilty of grave misconduct. This will be judged by the GCSA and a panel of independent advisors.

Members may be asked to serve for another term following the end of a 3-year term (up to a maximum term of service of 6 years).

Members cannot be reappointed unless their performance has been assessed as satisfactory. Satisfactory performance does not guarantee reappointment. The reappointment process will also need to consider:

- the balance of expertise likely to be needed in future years;
- the need to ensure that CST membership is refreshed periodically; and
- the need to retain expertise and ensure continuity.

Pay and expenses

CST members are not remunerated, except for reasonable, actual travel and subsistence costs relating to authorised CST business. Members will be reimbursed for travel and accommodation expenses according to the DSIT expenses policy for staff.²

Gifts and hospitality

All members are expected to ensure that acceptance of gifts and hospitality can stand up to public scrutiny.

Conflicts of interest

Every member will enter any relevant interests in the Register of Interests, maintained by the CST Secretariat, and keep the entry up to date. Should a matter give rise to a conflict of interest, a member is required to inform the chairs of CST in advance and withdraw from discussions or consideration of the matter. Guidance on handling conflicts of interests is

¹ The governance code of practice for public appointments came into effect in January 2017: <https://publicappointmentscommissioner.independent.gov.uk/regulating-appointments/governance-code/>

² At the time of publication, the DSIT expense policy allows for repayment of up to £166 for hotel accommodation in London.

provided in the '[Code of conduct for board members of public bodies](#)'.³ A detailed approach for how the Secretariat handles conflicts of interest can be found at [Annex A](#).

A member is expected to inform the co-chairs of CST in advance of a new appointment that may impinge on their duties as a member of CST. Members should report annually on potential conflicts of interest even if this information is unchanged.

Political activity

All members are expected to inform the co-chairs and Secretariat if they intend to accept a prominent position in any political party and understand that their appointment to CST may be terminated early, if it is felt that the positions are incompatible.

If, at any time during their term of office, a CST member accepts a nomination for election to the House of Commons, they will need to resign their appointment.

Official Secrets Act

The provisions of the Official Secrets Act 1911 to 1989 apply to members of CST. Unauthorised disclosure of any information gained in the course of this appointment, or its use by the member or others for personal gain or advancement, could result in the appointment being terminated.

Freedom of Information Act 2000

CST should operate from a presumption of openness and should abide by the statutory right to information provided by the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The primary examples are papers and reports produced by the CST, along with minutes of CST meetings. Information held solely by CST members is not subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. CST has a [publication scheme](#) that was drawn up under Section 19 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

To ensure openness and transparency, CST will seek to keep the public and stakeholders informed as they develop advice. In addition to the timely publication of minutes, CST should consider publishing interim working papers where these would be helpful. All substantive and significant papers should be published as soon as possible once CST has formulated and delivered its advice, unless non-disclosure is justified under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.⁴

³ Cabinet Office, Code of conduct for board members of public bodies:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/board-members-of-public-bodies-code-of-conduct>

⁴ All CST work is subject to the FOI Act. However, there are certain sections where this information can be withheld, if releasing it would jeopardise any policies that are being constructed for instance. Exemptions are subject to ministerial approval.

Roles and responsibilities

The role of the Chairs

GCSA co-chair

The GCSA is appointed ex-officio as co-chair to CST. The GCSA co-chair is responsible for:

- advising CST on government priorities and likely government reaction to CST's advice;
- facilitating engagement with ministers and senior government officials to support the delivery of CST advice;
- helping CST access information from government;
- being an active advocate for diversity and inclusion, including:
 - ensuring that the full range of scientific opinion, including views contrary to mainstream scientific consensus are appropriately considered; and
 - oversight of recruitment to ensure that there is sufficient diversity of skills, expertise and experience within CST's membership.

Independent co-chair

The independent co-chair is responsible for:

- deciding the course of the CST work programme and agreeing project leads;
- working and liaising with the GCSA, ministers and officials to inform CST advice and delivery of recommendations;
- being the outward spokesperson and advocate for CST;
- agreeing agendas for meetings with the GCSA;
- chairing the meetings when agenda items might conflict with the GCSA's role; and
- facilitating discussion among members to help reach a consensus on advice to government.

When advice is required urgently, the CST independent co-chair may act on the behalf of the CST.

The independent co-chair role is expected to spend around 3 to 4 days per month on the business of the Council.

The role of CST members

Members are expected to commit approximately 2 days per month to the work of CST.

All members are expected to attend quarterly meetings, with work outside these meetings conducted through project subgroups. Members are responsible for leading project subgroups, drafting advice to the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and engaging with government to support implementation of advice. Members should aim to reach consensus on issues. Cases of more substantial disagreement will be acknowledged explicitly.

Members of CST selected through open competition are appointed as individuals to fulfil the role of the Council, not as representatives of their profession, employer or interest group. All members have a duty to act in the public interest.

Members will be expected to abide by the public service values and standards in public service, including the '[Seven principles of public life](#)'.⁵

⁵ Committee on Standards in Public Life, Seven principles of public life:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>

CST Secretariat

The CST Secretariat provides impartial support to CST to provide the best advice to government. The Secretariat is staffed by the Government Office for Science (GO-Science). Working through the Director of GO-Science, the Secretariat can draw on additional GO-Science staff resource and expertise if needed to deliver the CST's agreed programme of work. The Secretariat should at all times respect the committee's independent role.

The role of the Secretariat includes:

- supporting both CST co-chairs and convenors of subgroups to develop and manage CST's programme of work;
- documenting expertise needs and assisting the Chairs in recruitment of members and co-opting expertise for subgroups;
- research and analysis to support the development of advice;
- organising quarterly and ad hoc meetings and providing briefing to inform discussion;
- recording the Council and project groups' meetings (the minutes will be non-attributable);
- networking with government departments and other organisations on behalf of CST;
- keeping the register of members' interests;
- supporting comms and external engagement; and
- managing the budget.

Working with government

CST's relationship with government should always be based on openness and transparency, respecting each other's roles and responsibilities, and CST's independence (also see the '[Principles of scientific advice to government](#)').⁶ CST should consult government as appropriate as its projects progress, both at the information-gathering stages and later as CST develops its recommendations.

It is important that CST can act, and be seen to be acting, in an unbiased and independent manner. At the same time, it is important for CST to maintain clear lines of communication between itself and government so that government is kept updated with emerging CST interests.

There may be circumstances where CST would wish to work more closely with government, for example where CST is filling a particular knowledge gap which either government or CST members themselves have identified.

CST will have regular meetings and communicate frequently with the Prime Minister. CST may also provide advice to the Science and Technology Cabinet Committee, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology and other Cabinet ministers.

CST will periodically invite the Prime Minister to propose areas where they would like advice. CST will always respond to requests for advice from the Prime Minister (though its response could be that in its view there was little to be gained from in-depth work on an issue). The Council will itself suggest topics and consult the Prime Minister on whether they would be interested before deciding whether to do further work. Room will be left in the work programme for CST to respond to urgent requests from the Prime Minister as necessary.

The GCSA, as co-chair, will link CST into government cross-cutting science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) issues and will facilitate contact between CST and ministers and departmental CSAs. The GCSA and the Secretariat will help provide CST with the contacts and information it needs from government. Where possible, CST will identify a sponsor minister in relation to specific projects. This is to facilitate engagement between CST and ministers and should not influence the independence of CST.

Officials from government departments, the devolved administrations and other organisations may attend meetings at the invitation of the co-chairs or convenors of the subgroups.

CST advice

CST will deliver advice in the form of letters, reports, meetings or events. CST will vary its style of meetings and will hold one-off workshops, roundtables and brainstorming sessions as well as subgroup discussions and formal plenary meetings, in settings conducive to the free exchange of views. Although CST will continue to be as open as possible about its work, it may deliver its advice in confidence, if the co-chairs agree this will enable it to be more useful.

⁶ GO-Science, Principles of scientific advice to government:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scientific-advice-to-government-principles/principles-of-scientific-advice-to-government>

Where possible when developing advice, CST will seek to engage a wide range of experts to inform their work or contextualise their advice. CST will publish its annual work programme and may hold open sessions with the science and technology community to promote an exchange of information and views.

When advice is required urgently, the CST independent co-chair may act on the behalf of the CST.

The Prime Minister will respond in writing to the Council to update on the government's implementation of CST advice. CST will periodically write to the government to provide further advice or to seek an update on the implementation of previous recommendations.

CST subgroups

The Council will determine how to best address its work. Generally, advice will be generated through members working in subgroups.

In selecting subgroups, CST should keep a balance between a combination of CST members most suited to the topic and members that may not normally be immediately identifiable with a particular view of the subject matter. In establishing a subgroup, the CST independent co-chair, in consultation with the Secretariat, will agree who should be approached to be convenor from among the members.

Subgroups should have the option of co-opting individuals or groups with expertise required for the discussing the topic which the CST subgroup have identified. These co-opted individuals are not members of CST and are appointed to the subgroup or give advice via the Secretariat for a limited period to fulfil a specific role. Owing to the nature of this role, these individuals do not need to be recruited in line with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments Code of Practice.

All subgroups should be of limited life and disbanded once the project is completed. There should be no standing subgroups, where the same members take on a series of different projects. CST subgroup members will continue to be engaged by the Secretariat to support delivery of recommendations by government.

Governance

The Council for Science and Technology adopts the government's '[Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees](#)'⁷ (CoPSAC or 'the Code') which is intended for the use of Scientific Advisory Committees and Councils (chairs and members), their Secretariats and the departments (or other public bodies) they are sponsored by and advise (policy staff and ministers).

The purpose of the Code is to provide guidance on the establishment, management and conduct of Scientific Advisory Committees and their relationship with the body they advise. The broad principles underpinning the Code are set out in the '[Principles of scientific advice to government](#)'⁸.

Publication of CST advice and activities

CST's website is the main channel where up-to-date information is published about the CST, its members and its work, including summaries of meetings, programmes of work, letters of advice, the government's response. Hard copies of reports and agendas are available to the public on request.

Where relevant, CST may publish evidence reviews commissioned to inform CST work and a list of people or bodies who provided evidence to inform CST discussions on a specific topic.

We do not publish contact details for CST members or guests. More information on how the CST Secretariat handles personal information is provided in [Annex B](#).

CST budget

Expenditure of the CST budget is at the discretion of the co-chairs, in consultation with the CST Secretariat. Where there are gaps in the information that government can provide to help CST in its work, agreement should be sought from both parties before commissioning analysis or consultancy.

The budget is managed by the CST Secretariat. The CST Secretariat processes members' travel and subsistence expenses and arranges the payment of invoices.

Media

All media enquiries should be directed to the CST Secretariat in the first instance.

One of the CST co-chairs will usually act as spokesperson for media engagement.

Members may be invited to speak to the media independent of their role on CST and it is their choice to accept or reject such an offer. When speaking in a personal capacity, this should be highlighted at the beginning of any interview. Members may wish to highlight published CST advice but should not comment on CST operations or confidential discussions prior to advice being approved by the Council.

⁷ GO-Science, Code of practice for scientific advisory committee:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scientific-advisory-committees-code-of-practice>

⁸ GO-Science, Principles of scientific advice to government:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scientific-advice-to-government-principles/principles-of-scientific-advice-to-government>

Where any personal social media accounts used by members refer to their role in CST, they should make clear in what capacity they are communicating.

Annex A: Detailed Secretariat guidance on handling conflicts of interest

Declaring, recording and handling conflicts of interest

1. It is a member's responsibility to declare any new conflicts of interests to the Secretariat as soon as these are taken on. Members should formally notify the Secretariat of new interests for the register by email
2. Members should discuss in advance with the co-chairs before accepting a new appointment that might conflict (or be perceived to conflict) with their role on CST.
3. The Secretariat will send a reminder on reporting interests in advance of each quarterly meeting (usually in meeting attendance request) including the template and guidance.
4. The Secretariat will update and republish the [register](#) of interests in advance of each quarterly meeting. Each update published will capture all newly declared interests over the previous quarter.
5. Co-chairs will remind members of their responsibility to declare any new interests verbally at the start of each meeting. The Secretariat or co-chairs may also suggest to a member that there is a potential conflict of interest in advance of a discussion (such as when a member volunteers to help develop advice on a specific topic).
6. The Secretariat will ensure the minutes record whether any or no conflicts of interest were highlighted by members and whether any action was needed.
7. Once a potential conflict has been identified, a discussion may be needed between the co-chair and the member to establish whether there is a genuine conflict of interest or could be a perception of a conflict and what action is needed.
8. Where a conflict of interest is held by one of the co-chairs, the other co-chair will take responsibility for the decision.
9. In matters in which the member has a conflict of interest, the member should not participate in the discussion or determination of a matter where the interest might suggest a danger of bias.
10. If there is a significant and persistent conflict of interest that cannot be resolved through any other route, the member may be asked to step down from a subgroup or resign from the Council.

Further detailed guidance

The main source of detailed guidance for managing conflicts of interest is the Cabinet Office '[Code of conduct for board members of public bodies](#)'.

The Secretariat may also seek guidance from the DSIT Public Appointments Team and the Proprietary and Ethics Team in Cabinet Office.

Annex B: Privacy notice

Purpose of this notice

This privacy notice is for participants in the Prime Minister's Council for Science and Technology meetings and contributors to CST project work. It outlines how the information you share is used by the CST Secretariat team in the Government Office for Science, whether it is disclosed and the ways in which we protect your privacy. This notice can be updated at any time, and we will inform you if this occurs.

What information is collected and for how long do we keep hold of it?

The information collected and stored consists of personal identifiers and contact details (for example, name, organisation, role and contact details).

The CST Secretariat will keep the personal data for a maximum of 2 years after a meeting has taken place or, if we are holding the information in relation to a CST project, for 2 years after the project has concluded and finalised advice submitted to government, or sooner if it is no longer necessary for purpose. Data on individual participants will be deleted if requested by that participant. Participants can do this by contacting the CST Secretariat.

Why is this information collected?

We will only use your personal information when the law allows us to. Most commonly, we will use your personal information in the following circumstances:

- where it is in the public interest to do so
- for official purposes
- in the exercise of a function of the Crown, a Minister of the Crown or GO-Science as a government body

In this case we need basic data to carry out the functions of:

- arranging quarterly council meetings
- gathering evidence and expert insights to inform CST advice on areas of science and technology policy

When a participant shares their data, we use the information to:

- contact CST members, members of CST subgroups and guests at CST meetings to arrange meetings; confirm logistics and undertake follow-up actions such as clarifying a participant's contribution
- record information about meeting attendance (by members and guests) and details about who has contributed to the topics discussed by CST members

Confidentiality and security

Any information you share with the CST Secretariat will be stored using DSIT IT system, including via their third-party providers (with which the department has data sharing agreements), which has encrypted storage and access controls. It will be held securely and in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation.

You have a right to access the personal information we hold about you at any time. If you wish to do this, please put your request in writing, explaining that your interest is in the Prime Minister's Council for Science and Technology, to the CST Secretariat team:

CST Secretariat
Government Office for Science
8th Floor, 10 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0NB

Email: CSTSecretariat@go-science.gov.uk