

Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP
Chair, Science and Technology Select Committee
House of Commons London
SW1A 0AA

14 September 2017

Dear Mr Lamb

Gender diversity on the Commons Science & Technology Select Committee

The Royal Society of Biology (RSB) strongly supports, and commends, the swift action you have taken to seek to redress the complete lack of female representation on the initial list of members for the new Commons S&T Committee. Your letter to the Chief Whips of 13 September 2017 reflects many of the concerns that are being expressed both by our membership and more widely in the scientific community. It is surprising that both the parliamentary and individual party nomination process run contrary to the agreed Diversity Policy objectives available on the Parliamentary website: <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/commons/house-of-commons-commission/single-equality-scheme/>. In particular, we are concerned that unless objectives, and the clear responsibility to consider them, are not embedded at all points in the process then poor outcomes can easily arise.

It remains essential that the important role played by Select Committees lives up to this ambition of inclusion and balanced representation across many characteristics. Parliamentary scrutiny of socially important issues by representative and knowledgeable groups will have even greater impact. In that regard also we urge you to encourage an improved balance of members with science and non-science backgrounds.

Through our individual and organisational membership the RSB reaches a community of over 50,000 bioscientists. We look forward to continuing to contribute to the work of the Science and Technology Select Committee and firmly believe that your impact and insight can only be enhanced by a more inclusive membership, especially the critical issue of gender balance.

I am copying this letter to the Chief Whips and request that this matter is given urgent attention – an update on plans to address this now and in the future would be very welcome. In this regard we would be pleased to engage with your suggestion to raise this with the Liaison Committee. A copy will also be placed on our website. This issue is of great interest to the STEM community and is relevant and important for all.

Sincerely



Dr Mark Downs FRSB CSci
Chief Executive

cc:

The Right Honourable Nick Brown MP
The Right Honourable Gavin Williamson CBE MP