

# UK election: Political parties respond on science

Five parties lay out their positions on climate change, stem cells, immigration, genetically modified organisms and funding.

Elizabeth Gibney

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Ahead of a [highly uncertain](#) UK general election on 7 May, *Nature* asked seven political parties about their policies on science. Below are summarized answers from the Green Party, Labour, Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the UK Independent Party (UKIP). The two parties of the current coalition government — the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats — did not respond before publication of this article.

## How would your party ensure that UK science maintains its current position in the world?

**Greens:** Our aim is to encourage basic research as well as research to address major environmental threats such as climate change, pollution and biodiversity losses, and to improve quality of life for all the inhabitants of the world. We believe that it is important to have a wide body of research that is not funded or controlled by large corporations. We will increase public spending on research and development (R&D) to at least 1% of gross domestic product (GDP).

**Labour:** We'll fix university finances, introduce a long-term R&D funding framework and invest in vocational training. Labour will take international students out of the net migration target and won't put our science base at risk through a reckless approach to Europe.

**Plaid Cymru:** To ensure that Wales is in a position to maintain and progress in the field of science, we need to increase children's ability in mathematics and scientific subjects, and to invest more in university scientific and technological research.

**SNP:** We will continue to develop, attract and retain skilled and talented people, grow capacity for world-class research, and stimulate its economic benefits. The SNP Scottish government encourages science as a career choice.

**UKIP:** UKIP will encourage more students to study science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine by removing tuition fees. This will help rebuild the pipeline of new UK scientists which is vital to our maintaining our position in the scientific world.

## What is your party's position on climate change and the measures needed to combat it?

**Greens:** We accept the strong scientific evidence that climate change is taking place due largely to human activities. Green policy is to decarbonize as quickly as can be reasonably be achieved and to invest heavily in renewables and energy efficiency. We should aim to



reduce all UK greenhouse-gas emissions to 10% of their 1990 levels by 2030.

**Labour:** Under the last Labour government, Britain was the first country in the world to enshrine a long-term emissions target into law. The next Labour government would set a decarbonization target for the power sector for 2030, unshackle the Green Investment Bank and reverse the decline in investment in clean energy.

**Plaid Cymru:** The party is committed to tackling climate change. We will introduce a Climate Change Act for Wales, adopting greenhouse-gas reduction targets for 2030 and 2050.

**SNP:** The SNP government passed the most ambitious climate-change legislation in the world and made our renewables targets even more ambitious, ensuring that Scotland will meet the equivalent of 100% of its electricity needs from renewable sources by 2020.

**UKIP:** We believe that climate change is a very real phenomenon (and always has been) [but we] are sceptical about the degree to which anthropomorphic climate change has been demonstrated and believe that investment to mitigate the effects of climate change would be more sensible than efforts to try and prevent it.

**What are the future energy needs of the UK, and how should the country balance fossil fuel, nuclear and renewable energy?**

**Greens:** Green Party policy is to phase out nuclear and fossil fuels and to move to a fully renewable energy base over decades. We strongly support investment and research into energy efficiency.

**Labour:** Labour is committed to the 2008 Climate Change Act, which will steadily reduce our emissions. In the next government our decarbonization target for the electricity supply will ensure that Britain relies less on unabated fossil fuels and more on renewable sources.

**Plaid Cymru:** Our energy policy will focus on increasing energy generation from renewable sources, with particular emphasis on tidal and hydro sources, such as the proposed tidal lagoons, and reducing our reliance on fossil fuels.

**SNP:** Scotland has set ambitious target of generating the equivalent of 100% of electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2020. The SNP sees no energy need for additional thermal-generation plants and does not support the building of new nuclear-power stations.

**UKIP:** We believe that the sell-off of our nuclear industry was a catastrophic error; that we must invest in nuclear energy; that we must exploit shale-based gas and oil in the shorter term to provide the economic platform for development of new clean energy sources; and that reliable renewable energy such as tidal generation, and small-scale localized intermittent renewables designed to reduce grid demand, are the way to go.

**Does your party support research on genetically modified (GM) crops, and the cultivation of such crops?**

**Greens:** We believe that the precautionary principle must be applied to research using genetic engineering; research should be genuinely in the interests of humanity, and animal welfare and biodiversity must be protected. We do not support GM crops but advocate a moratorium on the release of genetically modified (GM) organisms into the environment and on importation of food and feed containing GM organisms, pending comprehensive assessment of their safety.

**Labour:** GM can make an important contribution to tackling the challenge of global food security. It is right that EU member states decide themselves whether they wish to use genetically modified crops. The safety of people and the environment should be the government's top priority — any decision needs to be based on scientific evidence on a case-by-case basis.

**Plaid Cymru:** We are against the growth of GMOs [genetically modified organisms] in Wales and support a GMO-free British Isles and Europe on the precautionary principle. We have concerns about the impact of cross-pollination if the UK government pushes ahead with plans to introduce GMO crops in England.

**SNP:** The SNP has always taken a clear line that we do not support farm-scale cultivation of GM crops in Scotland. We are, of course, in favour of carefully regulated research and development but it is vital that we safeguard Scotland's reputation for natural crops.

**UKIP:** We do support research on GM crops, and will support a free vote on cultivation in Parliament.

**Does your party support research on embryonic and adult stem cells? Are there areas of this work that you feel should be off limits?**

**Greens:** The Green Party acknowledges the existing and potential benefits of stem-cell technologies, using both adult and embryonic

cellular material. However, we emphasize the importance of continuing ethical regulation, adequate government funding and transparency of research.

**Labour:** I believe that stem-cell research should be supported within a proper, evidence-based framework. I also voted to approve the [Human Fertilisation and Embryology \[Authority's\] regulations allowing mitochondrial donation](#) this year.

**Plaid Cymru:** We support embryonic and adult stem-cell research which may lead to scientific developments.

**SNP:** Scotland has a long-established international reputation with world-leading research strengths in areas including stem cells and regenerative medicine. The current SNP Scottish government has provided substantial funds towards the Scottish Centre for Regenerative Medicine in Edinburgh.

**UKIP:** We are in favour of scientific research but also respect people's moral or religious objections. Our MPs voted in favour of the recent change regarding mitochondrial disease, on a free vote.

**Would you change visa rules for international scientists and students?**

**Greens:** We have no plans to change visa rules for international scientists. We understand the huge contribution foreign students make to our education system and would not restrict their numbers. We would allow them once more to work in the UK for two years after graduation.

**Labour:** Labour believes we should want more fee-paying international students in the UK, and so we will ensure international students and academics are made to feel welcome again by taking students out of the net migration target.

**Plaid Cymru:** Wales' public services need skilled migrants to work here and help our economy to improve and this includes more scientists and students. We would reintroduce a post-study work visa for students graduating from Welsh universities.

**SNP:** Scotland has a clear economic rationale for growing our population — in particular our working-age population. The SNP would support the reintroduction of the post-study work visa.

**UKIP:** We intend to introduce an Australian-style points-based system, once we have regained control of our borders. This would prioritize highly skilled workers from anywhere in the world. Equally, we value the contribution of genuine overseas students and would be open to their continuing participation in our scientific excellence.

**Will your party be making a commitment to the science budget, either to ring fence it, or to increase or decrease funding?**

**Greens:** We would look to gradually increase public spending on scientific research, to ensure basic research is adequately funded and not controlled by large corporations.

**Labour:** Our long-term funding framework for science, which will include innovation and applied research, will give Britain's businesses and research base the stability it needs and signal our priorities for science and innovation.

**Plaid Cymru:** We believe more investment is needed, through our higher-education establishments, in scientific and technological research.

**SNP:** The SNP government plans to invest £282 million [US\$417 million] in university's core research and knowledge exchange in 2015–16 via the Scottish Funding Council, which represents an increase in the core funding for research allocated directly to universities.

**UKIP:** We do not have a specific manifesto commitment in this regard but our attitude can be determined in the answer to [the first] question.

**Read the full answers given by the five parties:**

[Green Party](#) 

[Labour Party](#) 

[Plaid Cymru](#) 

[Scottish National Party](#) 

[UKIP](#) 

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