

UK ELECTION 2015

The Green Party answers questions from *Nature*

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

The main aim of Green Party science and technology policy is to encourage and promote research, development and application of science and technology, which will increase knowledge and understanding; help to understand and address the major environmental threats such as climate change, pollution and biodiversity losses; and contribute to a better quality of life for all the inhabitants of the world.

Scientific research requires proper funding. We value basic research and will ensure it is properly funded. 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 R&D to at least 1% of GDP.

How do you view the state of UK science compared with five years ago?

UK science remains strong but we have concerns that some universities are reducing their science base. It is essential that there is not a commercial bias in research undertaken and that there will be sufficient funding to encourage independent and ethical research. The leading UK scientific university departments and institutions are some of the strongest globally and this is welcome. The discovery of graphene at Manchester University is a recent example.

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

We are committed to making sure that enough governmental funding goes towards research on major environmental issues such as climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. We want to ensure that basic research is adequately funded and not controlled by large corporations, so we would look to gradually increase public spending on scientific research. The results of publicly funded research should be published freely, increasing transparency and accessibility.

Is government-controlled science spending going to the right areas? Where would you change it?

We will follow the Haldane principle that the

government may guide overall strategic direction, but research councils decide which projects are to be funded.

How should infrastructure funding (that is, capital spending) for science be allocated?

We will ensure funding streams are long-term and ensure sufficient revenue streams are available for the maintenance and operation of all capital investments.

How high would policies on science and research come in your priorities in the scenario of negotiating any post-election coalition agreement?

The Green Party would not enter a formal coalition but could cooperate on an issue-by-issue basis and in that respect we would maintain our strong support for science and research.

Would you want to change visa rules for international scientists and students?

We have no plans to change visa rules for international scientists. In terms of foreign students, we understand the huge contribution they make to our education system, both financially and also in terms of the wider perspectives they bring. We would not restrict their numbers and would allow them once more to work in the UK for two years after graduation.

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

The Green Party accepts that certain uses of genetic engineering may be benign and may lead to enhanced quality of life, but believes that the release of GMOs (genetically modified organisms) into the environment potentially poses substantial risks to biodiversity, human health and animal welfare, and that there is currently insufficient research to quantify risks. In addition, genetic engineering of animals can cause significant suffering.

Control of research and the use of genetic engineering by a few multinational companies threatens the autonomy of farmers and health services and makes profit an underlying motive for the use of GMOs.

We believe that the precautionary principle must be applied to research using genetic engineering, that research should be genuinely

in the interests of humanity, and that animal welfare and biodiversity must be protected in research.

The Green Party does not support GM crops but advocates a moratorium on the release of GMOs into the environment and on importation of food and feed containing GMOs, pending comprehensive assessment of the safety of GMOs with regards to the environment, biodiversity and human and animal health. We support a legally binding protocol making industry liable for cross-contamination and any adverse effects of GMOs.

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

The Green Party acknowledges the existing and potential future benefits to humans and animals from stem-cell technologies, using both adult and embryonic cellular material. These benefits include direct medical advances, improved non-animal testing methods for new medical treatments and the advancement of knowledge. However, we also emphasize the importance of continuing ethical regulation, adequate government funding and transparency of research in the areas of embryonic and adult stem-cell technologies, to protect donors and the public health.

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

The Green Party accepts 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 steadily to reduce all UK greenhouse-gas emissions to 10% of their 1990 levels by 2030.

What is your view of the future energy needs of the UK, and the balance of fossil fuel, nuclear and renewable energy?

Green Party policy is to phase out nuclear and fossil fuels and to move to a fully renewable energy base, though we accept this will take decades. At the same time the party strongly supports investment and research into energy efficiency — preventing energy wastage is a

highly cost-effective element of energy policy.

What is your position on university tuition fees? Should they be allowed to rise, be capped or be cut, and how will you account for any resulting changes to university income?

The Green Party would abolish university tuition fees. Under a Green government there

would be no student loans as there would be no tuition fees and in the short term we will reintroduce student grants. Additionally, we will reintroduce the block grant to universities. By doing this, teaching and learning can be supported effectively across the sciences.

The Green Party supports a properly funded, accessible higher-education system

and recognizes that to achieve this a higher tax take is essential. Green policies in that regard include introducing a wealth tax and clamping down on corporate tax avoidance. ■

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