

From the President
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Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP
Minister for Government Policy
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
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Dear Mr Letwin,

RE: Comments on the new Consultation Principles

I am writing to you about the new Consultation Principles that replace the 2008 Code of Practice on Consultation. We welcome the move to adopt a more proportionate and targeted approach that focuses on meaningful engagement with stakeholders, rather than following a set process. We recognise the need for some decisions to be made quickly and support the need for flexibility in the timeframes for consultations. However, we seek your reassurance that adopting a consultation response time of less than 12 weeks will not become the default, as we believe that this may prevent expert membership organisations from being able to provide considered responses to support evidence-based decision-making in policy.

The Academy of Medical Sciences promotes advances in medical science and works to ensure these are converted into healthcare benefits for society. Our elected Fellows are the UK's leading medical scientists from hospitals and general practice, academia, industry and the public service. Like the other national academies and learned societies, we draw on the expertise of our Fellows, who number over 1000, to develop our responses to consultations from Government.

The Academy is able to respond to specific requests from Government for policy advice at very short notice; however, to enable us to provide the most authoritative and detailed response on critically important issues, we require sufficient time to gather the full range of perspectives from across our Fellowship and subsequently to enable Fellows to provide feedback on our draft response. The value of our Fellowship is that they are deeply involved in research and in many cases clinical practise; however this means that they have other commitments that can impact on their ability to respond rapidly. We hope that the value of responses from membership organisations will be reflected in guidance to Government Departments about how the new principles will be implemented.

We know that these views are shared by similar organisations, such as the Society of Biology, who wrote to you in detail on this matter on 6 September 2012, and we support their recommendations. We would be pleased to discuss this matter with you further.

Yours sincerely,

