



Cabinet Office

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Thank you for your email of 27 March expressing your concerns about the recent change to the Civil Service Code requiring civil servants to obtain Ministerial authorisation for contact with the media.

First of all I would like to be absolutely clear that the Government strongly values the contribution government scientists make to the media coverage of science. The recent clarification to the Civil Service Code is not in any way intended to change this. Although it is for individual Secretaries of State to determine how they wish to apply the provision and exemptions for areas of activity within their respective Departments, I would not envisage the provision to have any detrimental impact on the way that government scientists currently engage with the media about their expert subjects. Indeed, public engagement on scientific issues is vital for our innovative and high tech economy. In areas where government scientists are able to contribute their scientific expertise to the dialogue, this is encouraged by the government.

In addition, the Government clarified its position on the role of scientific advisers in its 2014 response to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee's report on Communicating Climate Science: "The primary role of scientific advisers to Government is to provide science and engineering advice to inform the policy-making process. Communicating issues such as climate science to a wider audience is therefore not their primary purpose and any public communication they do undertake will be in accordance with their responsibilities as civil servants. However, because of their position, Government scientific advisers have significant standing, independence and authority which provides both a platform and implicit responsibility for

communication of scientific issues. Many scientific advisers do undertake public engagement on science issues and view it as an important part of their role."

I would like to reassure you that the Government is strongly committed to increasing transparency and openness, and is in full support of government scientists' efforts in that regard. In light of comments made about the recent change, the Government is currently consulting on two further changes to the Code. These are to make it explicit that civil servants should be as open and transparent as possible with Parliament and the public, and to ensure it is up front in the Code that the new provision does not, in any way, prevent civil servants from exercising their rights under the whistleblowing legislation (the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998). The consultation will end on 30 April and I would welcome your views on these changes.

Finally, as a point of clarification, public servants in non-departmental public bodies (such as the Research Councils, for example) are not bound by the Civil Service Code. They are accountable to the Board of their organisation and have their own Code of Conduct. If the new provision were introduced into their Code of Conduct it would therefore specify that authorisation for contact with the media would need to be sought from the Board. However, as in the case of Government Departments, I would not expect the introduction of this to affect any public engagement by government scientists.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Francis Maude', written in a cursive style.

FRANCIS MAUDE