



Select Committee on Science and Technology

Corrected oral evidence: Forensic Science

Tuesday 4 December 2018

4.40 pm

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Members present: Lord Patel (The Chairman); Lord Borwick; Lord Fox; Lord Hunt of Chesterton; Lord Kakkar; Lord Mair; Baroness Neville-Jones; Lord Oxburgh; Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd; Baroness Young of Old Scone.

Evidence Session No. 14

Heard in Public

Questions 147 - 155

Witness

Rebecca Endean, Director of Strategy, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witness

Rebecca Endean.

Q147 **The Chairman:** Thank you for coming this afternoon to help us with our inquiry. Please say who you are for the record and if you have a statement to make, please feel free to do so. Otherwise, we will move on to the questions.

Rebecca Endean: Thank you for inviting me. I am the director of strategy at UK Research and Innovation. I will say a few words before I start. Forensic science is critical to the effective working of the justice system. It is very important in terms of both efficiency and efficacy, and UKRI plays a strong role in funding the fundamental science that provides discoveries across a broad range of disciplines that are implemented and put in practice to make the criminal justice system work harder. We are conscious that one of the jobs of UKRI is to make sure that we join up better with government and across the disciplines to fund research and innovation that makes a difference and this is an area where we should do that.

Q148 **The Chairman:** You recognise, therefore, that there is a need in your strategy to address the issues around forensic science and whether there is a need to support that area of research and innovation. Is that correct?

Rebecca Endean: That is correct, although, as a preamble, it would be wrong to make the assumption that we do not support it at the moment. Before I came, we did a trawl of the last 10 years of research council-funded projects and over that 10 years we funded 143 separate grants. That is £52 million of research.

The Chairman: Was this for forensic science?

Rebecca Endean: This was specifically where forensic science was mentioned in the title or in the abstract of the grant application. It was aimed to have a specific impact on forensic science. As you will be aware, a lot of the discoveries that have an impact on forensic science are serendipitous and they come from research where we never intended to find out something that was useful for forensic science. We think that there is at least another £25 million over that 10-year period where the research was intended to find something else but it yielded something that was useful for forensic science. The best example of that is a NERC project which set out to look at measuring ancient footprints and how they evolved over time, which ended up being very useful for footprint analysis and is now used in the forensic science service. There are quite a lot of projects of that nature.

The Chairman: Presumably most of your research funding in the future will be in the same mode as it has been in the past—responsive funding? For example, I apply for a grant and you assess it. In your strategy is there a possibility that you might look at areas that ought to be funded but are not, taking into account that there is an increasing need for innovations in both digital and cyber forensics, for example?

Rebecca Endean: The responsive mode throws up some very interesting interdisciplinary research projects in that area. We have just funded a £1.9 million project in Cambridge, countering crime in the cloud, which is funded by both the EPSRC and the ESRC. Our responsive mode does throw up quite a few of those individual projects. I am sure that there is more to be done in the future. We were lucky to receive additional money from the Government in the Autumn Budget Statement 2019. It has not been channelled into responsive mode funding; it has been channelled into a range of different funds. We are funding a lot of additional talent in the form of Future Leaders Fellowships and PhDs, some of them in subjects that are relevant to this area, such as AI and data science.

We also have the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund which is about solving some of the key challenges facing industry. We also have the Strategic Priorities Fund, which has three main objectives. The first is to fund ground-breaking interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary science. The second is to work across government on government priorities. Thirdly, it is there to fund novel and interesting things. We have just announced the first projects from that fund, mostly in climate change areas. There is the potential going forward, however, to work across government with the Home Office and the MoJ to fund more strategic projects of that nature.

Two things are critical to doing that. One is that we have to work closely with the Home Office, the MoJ, the judiciary and Dr Julie Maxton's group on science and justice to make sure that what we fund is what is needed. There is a bit of a job to work it out. To say that forensic science is a strategic priority is one thing; to work out what critical things we should be funding and how we best join up across the landscape is another. The second is that some of the most important discoveries that have had important implications for forensic science were not discovered through a call about the past but a call about the future. You do not necessarily know what the most important thing for forensic science is going to be a priori. We would want to keep some broad responsive-mode funding.

The Chairman: If this Committee ends up recommending a way forward for forensic science innovations, would you find that helpful?

Rebecca Endean: The landscape is quite fragmented. We currently fund quite a lot of research which is useful in this area. The Home Office funds some and Julie is doing some great work with her group. One of the most important things that we could do, and Julie made this suggestion when she came to talk to you, is that there might be scope for some sort of strategic oversight body which could look across all the funders and identify gaps and key priorities for funding forensic science research. That sort of strategic oversight body would be very useful.

Q149 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** You have answered this question already, particularly in respect of the Strategic Priorities Fund. It seems that forensics is an orphan in the storm. It does not sit under any particular council. From the evidence we have been given so far, it has not been terribly good at pulling together its own priorities for research and finding funding for them. It sounds, therefore, like your overarching body might well be the best answer.

Rebecca Endean: When we looked at what we had funded that was relevant to forensic science, it covered every single council. Even the arts and humanities had funded some ancient fingerprints on seals research which was very useful. That is part of the problem for forensic science because it is so broad. There are discoveries which cut across every single area of research which can then be useful. That makes it more of a job pulling it all together. On the overarching body idea, there is an example that exists in health research already called OSCHR—the Office for Strategic Coordination of Health Research. This brings together the NAHR, UKRI, the devolved Administrations and practitioners—who are really important in this agenda—to talk. That works quite well. You could see something like this—not controlling the money but deciding what the priorities and the gaps are. My instinct is that that is what is lacking.

Lord Fox: Is there a problem of naming here? Forensic science is applied science. By having a discipline—or a pseudo-discipline, because it is so many different disciplines—of forensic science, does this create a barrier to entry or to the flow of science into forensic use, or is it not an issue at all?

Rebecca Endean: I do not think that is an issue. Forensic science is the application of discoveries across a broad range of different science and research methods, and often it is the application that makes it multidisciplinary.

Lord Fox: What I am really asking is: does the fact that we call it forensic science stop people doing it? Does it stop other science flowing into that area or does it flow naturally anyway?

Rebecca Endean: My instinct is that it flows naturally. It is interesting. You can clearly see the public good that has come from it. Forensic science is about the implementation of the discoveries and I guess that if there is a gap it is around the implementation area which falls between the Home Office, the police forces, the judiciary and ourselves. That is probably where the gap is in terms of the area that needs some attention.

Lord Kakkar: You mentioned a number of different bodies which are contributing funding for research in the area of forensic science. What proportion of that has come from the research councils and what proportion from those others? Do you have any sense of that?

Rebecca Endean: I do not have any sense. One of the things that Dr Julie Maxton is trying to do in her science and research group is to map that funding. That would be a useful thing to do. Instinctively, I suspect that we might provide the lion's share, if you could add it up. If you look at the landscape, and you can tell this from various REF case studies, there is a lot of interaction at a local level between local universities, local police forces and local criminal justice systems. This is an endogenous thing that you would probably want to encourage because it is a good thing to do. Getting a grip of where that is happening across the piece would be a good idea. If I had to guess, I would say that we probably spend more than anybody else.

The Chairman: If you looked at all the academic institutions and where the forensic science research is being done, would you find that the research councils are major funders?

Rebecca Endean: You probably would.

The Chairman: Are you sure of that?

Rebecca Endean: Yes, if you included the QR funding that flows through Research England as well as all of UKRI funding—that would be QR funding and all the research councils. I cannot prove that. We probably know broadly how much we spend, but I am not sure.

The Chairman: For instance, recently Leverhulme funded three forensic units at £10 million each. Is that correct?

Rebecca Endean: I think it was £10 million over a number of years. I do not think it was £10 million per annum. The Leverhulme contribution was relatively small.

Lord Kakkar: To come back to one other point: you suggested the creation of an OSCHR-like body. Where should that sit?

Rebecca Endean: I may be inventing something and I hope that my colleagues elsewhere do not think that it is a bad idea. If you take the OSCHR model, there is an independent chair. The independent chair is appointed by the DH. My guess is that you would do the same thing. You would have some sort of independent chair to bring it all together because that is a way of bringing all the different parties to the table.

Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd: The impression that I have had from the evidence is that forensic practitioners believe that very little money is spent on research. You have mentioned two things: the work you have done on footprints and the work that you have done on fingerprints, which have contributed to the advancement of forensic science. Can you let us know the precise ways and other instances, so that the forensic community could see that you are spending a lot of money?

Rebecca Endean: We looked over the past 10 years. I should have written to you beforehand, but I can write to you and outline what they are.

Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd: I would like to know what the specific benefit from research is. We went to the Scotland Yard fingerprint bureau and it would be fascinating to find out because fingerprinting is not really a science. It would be interesting to know how what you have done—and in footprints, which, again, is not the same—makes a difference so that you can show people that they are under a misconception or that the research councils are under a misconception. One or the other has a misconception. We would like to know which.

Rebecca Endean: I can write to you with details of what we have spent the money on in the last 10 years and on what sort of projects. The science of fingerprinting is about 100 years old. But the science of footprints and gait and the way people walk is much more recent, as well

as things such as rapid DNA testing and digital stuff. We might find that more of our research is in those sorts of areas rather than fingerprinting.

Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd: I want to know what it is in detail so that someone can be disabused of a misconception.

Lord Kakkar: If I might ask also, of those 140-odd projects that have been supported over the 10-year period, do you have any information demonstrating how the outputs of that research were published? Were they in peer-reviewed journals in the way that much of the other research that you support through UKRI and research councils would be? Would there be an expectation for that?

Rebecca Endean: Where they are completed, we can do, but a lot of these will be in-flight projects. We will have a look.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: I have worked on particles, and on a murder trial which used the latest ideas on particles and jets and all sorts of things. This is an example of where the research being funded comes out of basic support and it may be that by flagging up connections between research of a fundamental nature and its application you could get more people making a case for their fundamental research because it has this application. It would be the same with computer systems and data and so on. It is a good peg on which to hang a lot of applications. One thing that scientists at a university have difficulty with is where something is an idea and how they can find an application of it. You could do more with the forensic knowledge by flagging this up. For example, the group at Imperial College, who do all the flow in and out of aspects of the head and chest and so on—that is all useful in a forensic way. Somebody from the Imperial College group did some amazing tricks to show the jury. He took a pen and stuck it up his nose and said, “This is the way the airflow and the particles move”. It greatly impressed the jury. More seriously, this is an example of connections between fundamental research and its application which could be better explained.

Rebecca Endean: I agree. It is worth saying that at the next REF we are going to put a tag on all submissions that have a forensic science implication so that we can try to draw them together and ensure that they are assessed properly. We think that would be a useful way of being able to draw together all of the good case studies across the whole scientific endeavour which have implications for forensics.

Q150 **Lord Borwick:** When you mentioned earlier the total amount over the last 10 years of £52 million and 143 different studies, what percentage of the total expenditure of UKRI was that?

Rebecca Endean: It would be relatively small. The annual expenditure of UKRI over that 10-year period would have been roughly £6 billion so my guess is it would be about 1%. It is a relatively small percentage.

Lord Borwick: Tiny really, considering the importance of every single case. The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee has recommended a number of times, going back several years, that it should be a research priority. We hear that it is not a research priority in any of

the UK research councils. Do you think that the Government have taken seriously these Select Committee recommendations? Does it not sound as though it has been accepted as an interesting idea by Parliament but we end up with less than 1% actually being spent on that?

Rebecca Endean: It is tricky to comment on the predecessor bodies. They have funded excellent research in this area.

Lord Borwick: In that £52 million?

Rebecca Endean: The £52 million relates to projects where you can clearly identify at the outset of the project that it is driven by the need to fund developments in forensic science. It will be supplemented by a large number of projects which did not set out to meet a forensic science need but did deliver some benefits. The £52 million, therefore, is the lower band of it. I do know that the research councils over a number of years did a lot of activity working with stakeholders and with different government departments on this. It is important to set the strategic priorities but that is not enough. We need to understand what is required, what is best funded by UKRI, what is best funded by government departments, and look at the overall landscape. That gives us a more specific thing to work with. If I had to say what was lacking over the last period it is probably that good join-up between the councils and the government departments which work in this area, and that should be the priority going forward.

Lord Borwick: You mentioned the 10 years and the 143—we did not—so I am picking that up as a theme that you had brought up. Even if you took the last year, it is still a tiny percentage of the total research and yet we are hearing that, as a percentage of the importance in each case, it is going up and up and up. Does this not shout that there is a problem here?

Rebecca Endean: There is potentially a problem but, as I said before, I would want to understand what the needs are and what is not being funded that should be, and make sure that we get a clear understanding of that landscape. We would then make the case for additional funding in those particular areas.

Lord Borwick: But if it has been recommended by a Select Committee and accepted by the Government that it should be a priority, do you have to look at the details as to what the importance is within that priority or should it be accepted as a priority because it has been recommended by Parliament, and the money should be allocated accordingly and let that be judged as to whether it is well spent?

Rebecca Endean: We always have a duty to ensure that we spend money efficiently and effectively. We have a strategic priority. We also need to make sure that we choose the best possible research projects and that they are aligned and work efficiently. As well as having a strategic priority, we would need to make sure that what we were doing was the right thing. That involves proper engagement with the Home Office, the MoJ and other partners and practitioners to make sure that what we are funding adds value.

Lord Borwick: Do you think that the other departments that you mentioned have understood the importance that we are finding in this Committee of forensic science? Will it still be an orphan in five years' time?

Rebecca Endean: I think they do understand the importance. With the way the digital world is changing, it is obviously going to be a critical issue going forward. The Home Office asked Dr Julie Maxton to set up the science and research forum following a report written by Sir Mark Walport—who is now my boss—which looked at the whole issue of forensic science. It is that join-up that we need to focus on and I would be surprised if that did not continue to be a growing priority.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: We have been searching in the forensic science field for leadership and not really finding it. Is there another sector that you can think of, which falls into the same category of being covered by a number of research councils but which has done better in pulling together its own set of priorities and coming to the research council community, that the forensics people could learn from? Or are all of those areas that are genuinely across many disciplines floundering around, making a pig's ear of it, if you pardon my technical term?

Rebecca Endean: I do not think I could agree with the last bit. Forensic science is particularly difficult because it covers practically every discipline and it is not always obvious what the implications are when you are doing discovery research. There are other areas, however. There is work going on in public health, for example, where a lot of the interesting research that relates to public health is economic and social research rather than medical research. There is work looking at a join-up across those elements.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Are they more competent at identifying their priorities?

Rebecca Endean: They have been slightly better. Professor Chris Whitty, who is the Chief Scientific Adviser in DH, is doing work in this area at the moment. He has a group which is chaired by Professor Anne Jackson which is trying to do exactly that. It is looking at priorities for public health where the research is so cross-cutting. The issues around forensic science are particularly difficult because you have two government departments, lots of different practitioner groups on the ground, and a number of different research councils. It is probably as disparate as it could be.

The Chairman: Lord Mair's question might help take it forward.

Q151 **Lord Mair:** Returning to your point about the 143 projects, they were all over the last 10 years and they would all have been on responsive mode.

Rebecca Endean: All on responsive mode, yes.

Lord Mair: In other words, the research councils were waiting for the universities to come up with good ideas. Were you to go down the line of strategic priority, that would point more towards dedicated calls, would it not?

Rebecca Endean: Yes.

Lord Mair: If you were trying to do that, how would you formulate those dedicated calls? Would you be consulting the forensic science world, coming up with ideas and then coming through with dedicated calls? One example is that many of us visited the Metropolitan Police forensic laboratory and we were shown the fingerprinting operation, which still relies heavily on experienced people. We were quite surprised, in the world of artificial intelligence and machine learning and computer vision techniques, that that technology is not presently used in the fingerprinting world. Might that be the sort of thing a dedicated call could seek research proposals on?

Rebecca Endean: On that question it is worth talking to the Alan Turing Institute because we are funding it to help improve public services and that is an example where it can use AI and big data techniques. Sorry, this is not answering your question. But I would definitely recommend that the Met talks to the Alan Turing Institute because it could help that force, and we provide funding for it for exactly that sort of issue. If we were going to have a specific call in the area of forensic science, my advice would be to have clear goals and objectives which are worked out with the forensic science community and not make it too general. That would require consultation with all the key players to ask: what are the most important things that you do not know? If you make it too general, it will be difficult to work out where the value-add is and there is a risk that you will get a lot of stuff which is not good.

The Chairman: Through this inquiry we have learned that forensic science evidence is extremely important to the criminal justice system but there are problems. One is that we do not have a national forensic service that will provide that service but also engage in innovation and research. It is reliant on the police who have to find private practitioners who do not do any innovations because they are not funded enough to make enough profit so that they can fund innovations. We do not have government-backed or research-council-backed innovations occurring, when there is clear evidence that more and more forensics is required not only in the existing areas that we know about but in digital—Lord Mair just mentioned AI—and cyber, not only for the criminal justice system but for the prevention of crime and also for democracy, as somebody mentioned earlier. Where does the research council see its role in promoting this kind of science?

Rebecca Endean: On innovation, we have Innovate UK funding, which will be available to private sector companies which want to innovate in this area, but we also provide innovation funding through various research councils which can be used to help the forensic science service; for example, in rapid DNA testing, we provided Innovate funding through the BBSRC. In fact, the Innovator of the Year 2016 was a BBSRC fundee who did a lot of work for the forensic science service on rapid DNA. There is definitely a role that we can provide in terms of funding the basic science and follow-on innovation funding. I would not necessarily see that as solely the role of UK Research and Innovation. There has to be a role for the government departments to do this and there are a range of tools

available to them. It is important that government departments see this as their role because they are the final consumers of this innovation, and if they commission it is more likely to be relevant for them.

The Chairman: That is like saying the health service should fund all research because the final consumers are researchers.

Rebecca Endean: The innovation is more likely to be relevant to the practitioners if the practitioners are involved in its design and funding.

The Chairman: I will not pursue it further. Lord Hunt.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: All your replies are similar to replies I have heard from research councils for 30 or 40 years. One of my concerns, which I have encouraged, is the creation of research networks focused on something. I helped set up a European research network, ERCOFTAC, and we have sub-groups within that which are specialist. The people who work in this informal network then have to go off to research councils. The research councils, particularly in the UK, have not been encouraging, though that has begun to change. You have begun to support this. Do we have the right technical networks to support this? For example, there is one in ERCOFTAC about particles and how they go and all that sort of thing. It is an extremely effective way of doing things. The European Commission in Brussels always supports these kinds of things. Here we have, if I may say so, a rather weak informal group that runs forensics. The question is whether you are supporting this. Will that be an effective way of using your money? Your research council has now set up some of these research networks that were not there before and they connect into the European ones.

If I may paraphrase what you are saying, you have these researchers, they put in applications but you do not say, starting at the back, "What kind of network we should have, which will ensure that we do the research and have the application?"

Rebecca Endean: That is a good point and I will go back and check that we have the right sorts of networks. We have lots of interaction with various institutes across the country that look at this area. Whether we should fund a specific network on forensic science probably requires looking at.

Q152 **Baroness Neville-Jones:** You said earlier that UKRI was tagging some of the grants. Am I right in thinking that you want to see how the forensic science elements in these relate to each other? Could you explain?

Rebecca Endean: I was referring to the next REF—research excellence framework. As you know, there are so many units of assessment for the different disciplines and what we have agreed is that if there is a forensic science application from any of the impact case studies we will get the university people to tag this and to mark up when it gets sent in, for two reasons. One is that we can aggregate them and have a look across all the submissions to the research excellence framework exercise to see where there is an implication for forensic science. Secondly, when we are

doing the research excellence process we can ensure that it gets assessed properly so that the impact on the forensic science aspect of that case study can be looked at properly. There has been a lot of discussion with the community over a number of years to look at that. It is a very sensible solution, rather than trying to create a forensic science unit of assessment when we know that the underpinning science is so broad.

Q153 Baroness Neville-Jones: It seems that that is a bit small. What seems to emerge from what you are saying is that there is need for a consultation exercise to see where the gaps are. The evidence we have heard, which now comes from all corners, is that the quality of forensic science in this country is in severe danger of decline, to the detriment of the criminal justice system, and there all sorts of causes for it, including money, dispersal of the talent and the fact that there is no central body—all sorts of things which are both structural and the result of the operation of the system over time with inadequate funding.

I sympathise with what you said about government departments taking some of the load. It does not seem to me that it is the function of the research councils to substitute for regular departmental funding of research that is directly related to the function of the department. Having said that, it seems that there is likely to be in the digital age an ongoing need for advanced research involving the universities and, therefore, there is an ongoing role for the foreseeable future for the sort of thing that UKRI does. How would you see a mixed ecology evolving? What sort of pattern would you like to see emerge for supporting the underlying research in this important field?

Rebecca Endean: A mixed ecology is right. I would like to see the Home Office and the MoJ making sure that they are investing in the important science that they need to make their respective bits of the justice system work properly. That is about the practical application and implementation of that science. I would want that joined up with what we are doing, but also with what local criminal justice systems are doing on the ground with local universities. Some of the most exciting things are happening in local ecologies. The answer has to be a balance between the two. Therefore, I am probably arguing for more money for government as well as more money for UKRI to keep the balance right. If you try to fund it all through the research councils and Innovate, there is a risk that you lose relevance and practical application of what you are trying to do. You sometimes need to fund it through both routes and make sure that they are joined up properly.

Baroness Neville-Jones: That is a perfectly sensible answer. I would suggest that you look at how it is done in Northern Ireland and Scotland. There is an English problem.

Rebecca Endean: That goes back to the point about whether it is better to try to do this locally rather than nationally. There are a number of things that Scotland and Northern Ireland and Wales do slightly better.

Baroness Neville-Jones: And how it is structured.

Rebecca Endean: Yes.

Q154 **Lord Oxburgh:** How big is your constituency in this area of specialism? There is the question of what your council does in looking after the rare fish. Is it determined by the size of the group that you have because if there are not that many the solution is almost certainly different from other significantly larger communities? Would you like to talk about that?

Rebecca Endean: It is a difficult question because it is about where you draw the boundaries between how you decide who is working on something that is relevant to forensic science and who is not. It is difficult to say. Relatively few people, probably, define themselves purely as a forensic scientist in the research world but there are a lot of people working on research which has some implications for forensic science. I am sorry, that is not a very good answer, but that is the size of it, as it were.

Lord Oxburgh: Do you have a view on how many people are earning a living as forensic scientists?

Rebecca Endean: I do not know the precise answer to that question. There is a question about who is a practising forensic scientist working for the criminal justice system and who is working in the research world. I do not know how many forensic scientists are working in private sector companies.

Q155 **Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd:** To bring my question into bounds I want to put some points to you first. It is clear that there are areas of forensic science where there is no scientific foundation. We have discussed fingerprints; gunshot residue is another. There are quite a number. Would you agree?

Rebecca Endean: I am not a complete expert but I suspect that you might be right.

Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd: It is clear that forensic science must be able to help improve areas of investigation for the future, particularly the use of artificial intelligence. It is clear that since the US National Academy of Sciences reported on this in 2009 this problem of underpinning science and research has been known about for some years.

Rebecca Endean: Correct.

Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd: I fail to understand why if one looks at all the stuff, and I am sorry to use the vernacular, there is an awful lot of waffle and few hard signs of developing a strategy showing these are the areas and we need to do something about it. Who do you think ought to be doing this?

Rebecca Endean: On your first point about the quality of the science, it is worth saying that one of the biggest problems is that rigorous scientific method and statistical analysis is not always what it should be in a lot of these underlying bits of work. On the second, it does sound like waffle but I refer to the previous point that I do not think that one body by itself can develop a strategy for forensic science. We have to find a way of

bringing all the relevant actors together to work out what the priorities are. That is critical.

Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd: But that is a body. If you bring everyone together you create a body. Who should do that? You or someone else?

Rebecca Endean: In order to give it some teeth it should probably be commissioned by a government department.

Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd: Which department?

Rebecca Endean: My guess is that the most relevant department is the Home Office, but there are massive implications for the Ministry of Justice as well as a consumer of all the evidence.

Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd: This detailed strategy, therefore, which everyone feels that something ought to be done about, is a problem not for the research council but for those two ministries?

Rebecca Endean: If there was a recommendation and a plan to develop a proper forensic science research strategy, we would be willing to help and be active contributors to the development of that strategy because it is very important.

Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd: How long will this take, bearing in mind that it has gone on for years and that people go to prison or are wrongly convicted if the scientific evidence is not right?

Rebecca Endean: We are going to do a spending review next year. The spending review will be important in setting long-term directions and spending on science and research across all government departments and within UK Research and Innovation. I imagine that over the next year would be a good time to do such a strategy.

Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd: Do you think that would be the most important way of getting forward movement on this subject or, if not, what other route would you suggest?

Rebecca Endean: It is still the best chance for getting forward movement on this at the moment. If you asked us to set it as a strategic priority I suspect the same thing might happen again, whereas if we get a commitment to get all the parties to work together to produce something that we can all buy into and report back to you on a regular basis, that might have some traction.

The Chairman: What happens if the Home Office asks you to do it?

Rebecca Endean: The Home Office might want to consider appointing an independent chair to do something of this nature because that is the best way to make it work, as I have seen in other spheres.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: I wondered whether there have been conversations and discussions with the two science advisers in the Home Office and the MoJ about this issue. Has this exercised their minds?

Rebecca Endean: I have had discussions with John Aston, who is the CSA in the Home Office, relatively recently. I must admit that I have not

gone into as much detail as you have just subjected me to. I will promptly do so after this meeting.

Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd: I think you will find that Sir Mark Walport and the Chief Scientific Adviser at the Home Office have been trying to get this subject moving for some years.

Rebecca Endean: I can imagine.

The Chairman: Thank you very much for coming to help and I am sorry that at times we have been a bit too forensic with you. Thank you for coming to help us. We appreciate that.