

Royal Society of Biology – Supplementary written evidence (LSI0130)

Letter from Dr Mark Downs CSci FRSB, Chief Executive, Royal Society of Biology, following an evidence session on 16 January 2018.

Life Sciences Industrial Strategy inquiry: the value of the agri-food chain

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Life Sciences Industrial Strategy with your Committee on 16 January 2018.

At the meeting, Lord Kakkar asked about the economic value of several sectors beyond biomedical science in which the life sciences play a key role. I am writing to clarify the evidence provided at the meeting and to offer further information.

During the evidence session, I provided the figure for the Gross Value Added (GVA) of the UK agri-**food** sector, which stood at £112.0bn in 2016.¹ The figure comes from the most recent *Food Statistics Pocketbook*, produced by Defra, which was last updated on 14 November 2017, and draws on data from surveys run by Defra and from the Annual Business Survey. The figure is the sum of the estimated values for agriculture and fishing (£9.0bn), food and drink manufacturing (£28.8bn), food and drink wholesaling (£12.0bn), food and drink retailing (£29.8bn), and non-residential catering (£32.4bn). Food and drink manufacturing is the UK's biggest manufacturing sector by GVA. Biosciences research in agriculture underpins these value-chains.

To clarify, the £112bn figure is not the size of the agri-**tech** sector. There is no definitive estimate for the size of the UK agri-tech sector, nor indeed a single, widely-accepted definition of what comprises agri-tech. The best available estimate is a research paper published in 2016 by the (then) Department of Business, Innovation and Skills.² Using data from 2013, the report estimated the size of the UK agri-tech sector to be £14.3bn GVA. The majority of this comes from the farming industry (£10.3bn GVA). The plant subsectors contributed £0.7bn GVA to the total (comprising plant genetic improvement, plant health, crop storage and silage), while the animal subsectors contributed £1.1bn GVA (from animal genetic improvement, animal nutrition, animal health and welfare). The remainder of the value added in the agri-tech sector comes from ICT systems and decision support, environmental and physical subsectors, engineering and precision farming, infrastructure and advisory services.

Your final question asked whether the Royal Society of Biology could have stressed the importance of agricultural and animal science in response to the green paper. We discussed the significance of these areas in our response to the Industrial Strategy green paper, which can be viewed here:

https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/article/policy/RSB_response_to_BEIS_consultati

¹ Defra, 2017. *Food Statistics Pocketbook 2017*.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/food-statistics-pocketbook-2017/food-statistics-in-your-pocket-2017-summary>

² Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, 2016. *Agri-Tech Industrial Strategy: Evaluation Scoping Study and Baseline*.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536388/bis-16-18-agri-tech-industrial-strategy-evaluation-and-baseline.pdf

[on Building our Industrial Strategy.pdf](#). We also called for consideration of the full range of biosciences in our written evidence to your inquiry, which benefitted from input by the Microbiology Society, and is published here: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/science-and-technology-committee-lords/life-sciences-and-the-industrial-strategy/written/70487.html>. A green paper was not produced for the Life Sciences Industrial Strategy, and we were not involved in consultations with Sir John Bell. I was therefore pleased to have the opportunity of making these points in our written and oral evidence to your Committee.

24 January 2018