

Researchers attack Brussels for ousting top scientific adviser Professor Anne Glover

Leading research organisations have lambasted the European Commission for ousting its Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Anne Glover – a development she had been fearing for some time and believed would represent “the most amazing backward step” for the institution.

The EC has said it will scrap Professor Glover’s role at the end of the year, ending her three-year stint in a newly created position in which she alienated green campaigners and other EU staff by promoting the use of genetically modified crops.

“Everyone – Europeans and the rest of the world alike – will rightly see this decision as the European Commission downgrading both the practical and symbolic value of science in Europe,” said Imran Khan, chief executive of the British Science Association.

Dr Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust, agreed. “The Wellcome Trust is deeply disappointed by the Commission’s decision to abolish the role. There has been no explanation to the scientific community across Europe, which has admired, respected and valued the contribution Anne Glover has made,” he said.

Professor Nigel Brown, president of the Society for General Microbiology, also said he was “appalled at the abolition of the CSA post”.

Professor Glover refused to comment on her departure yesterday. But The Independent can reveal that she had deep misgivings about her ability to do her job in the face of in-house politics, poor internal communication, insufficient support and a lack of clarity about her role.

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In a damning conference speech this summer, Professor Glover gave a presentation summing up her first 1,000 days in office, a landmark which she had just passed.

“I would say in-house politics did hamper the efficiency of the role. Many people in the Commission simply did not want a Chief Scientific Adviser, so it was a little bit difficult,” she told the Science Advice to Governments conference in Auckland, New Zealand, on 28 August. “I did have the necessary independence but I was often excluded from the essential information.”

She also used her August speech to hit out at the campaign for her removal: “Although I repeatedly asked people to come and debate these issues with me, they won’t do that ... they don’t want a debate, in my view.”

Tackling the calls for her dismissal directly, she said: “I would be the first to say we really must do things better, but getting rid of the role would be the most amazing backward step and terribly damaging to the Commission.”

Professor Glover said her role had been difficult from day one – at the start of 2012. “I turned up and it was almost as if they had forgotten I was coming,” she said, adding that she did not meet her immediate boss – the then EU President, José Manuel Barroso – until day 51 because he “had other things on his mind”.

She added: “There is no point in having a scientific adviser and not taking advantage of them.”

Professor Glover wrapped up her conference speech by saying that, despite the many obstacles, “I love my job, it’s absolutely great” and that this was because helping science to improve the lives of the citizens of Europe and beyond was such an important thing.

Finally, she expressed her hope that the then incoming President, Jean-Claude Juncker, would make it his business to upgrade her role.

“I hope he will strengthen the role of Chief Scientific Adviser. I guess we will have to wait and see; that will be interesting,” she said.