

Royal Society for Chemistry Parliamentary Links Day

Thank you for your invitation to address the Parliamentary Links Day. This event has long been firmly established in the annual Parliamentary Calendar and offers a wonderful opportunity for the scientific community to engage with parliamentarians.

Science has a central role in almost everything we as parliamentarians are trying to do. It is clear that scientific developments have had a huge transformative effect on our society and economics

Science will also be central to the big questions that we as politicians have to face in the future. These challenges and the role that science needs to play is neatly summed up by the title of this year's event: *Science and the Global Challenge*

Two of these major global challenges we face are the challenge of globalisation and the challenge of climate change; science will have a key role in our response to both.

Science will play a key role in measuring and predicting the likely effects of climate change. Science will also have to provide the solutions to the threat of climate change by delivering new technology to increase energy efficiency and new ways of generating clean energy.

Globalisation has been driven by scientific advances in telecommunications and the development of the internet. The UK will only thrive in this new

competitive climate by upskilling, making sure that we can provide the skills base and the infrastructure to add value through world beating R&D. The role of science in our economy is set to become even more important.

The UK cannot compete with the USA on volume of research nor with India and China on numbers of science and engineering graduates. So we must compete by boosting the excellence of our scientists and science facilities and teaching.

Maintaining – and enhancing - our national capacity in science, technology, engineering and mathematics is essential if we are going to attract and retain hi-tech high value added investment .

Science will be at the heart of the next Conservative Government both in terms of our support for science and also use of science in drawing up government policy in many areas (environment; energy; food; international aid; security etc).

Science expenditure has risen over recent years. This is a good thing. We, however, have to ask if this money is been spent in the most effective way. Could different ways of spending better help the position of the UK in an increasingly competitive scientific world?

One government decision that has not helped the long term planning which successful research programmes need is the recent claw back of £98 million from the science budget to pay for over spends in other areas of the DTI.

UK science punches above its weight in terms of publications and citations - but we need to do more to exploit discoveries

Conservatives have established a policy task force, under the chairmanship of Ian Taylor MP, which is looking at ways of boosting the strength of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics in the UK:

The group has come up with a number of recommendations such as:

- An Innovative Projects Agency (IPA) with a budget of £1bn achieved by absorbing the Technology Strategy Board, some research council activity, research funded by other government departments and some of the work now devolved to Regional Development Agencies.
- Smarter public procurement, using the £150bn a year government spends on goods and services to pull through UK innovation.

Based on successful models from overseas, the IPA will seek to act as a catalyst to help scientific ideas turn into products it will act as a customer and a facilitator between research and product design.

Amongst other proposals the group has recommended a re-weighing of the Research Assessment Exercise to recognise excellence in research to take discovery towards application.

The task force is purely advisory, but its recommendations will be listened to with up most seriousness when we come to drawing up the manifesto.

We are not proposing a diminution of the importance of ‘blue skies’ research. I believe that Government has a key role in funding this pure scientific research, but when results emerge, we need to recognise and reward those university departments which succeed in starting the process of exploitation. Creating something that is user driven is what distinguishes innovation from basic research.

As well as giving a boost to innovation we need to give a boost to the role of science in society. Scientists and scientific knowledge will be key to our future success. We need more trained scientists, more people with science degrees attracted to careers in research and development.

Education from an early age will be key to making this happen. We are looking at ways to provide greater incentives for science graduates to go into and stay in teaching

Increase emphasis on Foundation degrees to give school students who have not studied adequate science A levels to enter a science degree course.

Boost industry/university co-operation with schools to help teachers update or deepen knowledge of science

Radically improve careers advice to enable school pupils from 11 onwards to recognise the opportunities open to those who study individual science subjects. Our education team are looking at ways of improving the teaching of science at state schools and to ensure that the option of taking single

science A levels doesn't become the preserve of those educated in the independent sector.

We as politicians and opinion makers need to do more to explain just how key science is to what we do and what an important role it plays in the great economic and social developments which are changing the way we live our lives. Scientists have a duty to explain why what they do excites them and just how the work they do has a direct impact on our understanding of the world and the way we live our lives. I am encouraged by the number of projects and initiatives to improve the public understanding of the importance of science, the Parliamentary Links Day, being one of the most successful.

The Conservative Party wants Britain to lead the world in scientific research and innovation and I look forward to working with the scientific community to make that happen