

# POWER ATTRACTS – AND REQUIRES – ADVICE

## *Science, Parliament and Government*

There has never been a time when science has been more central to the concerns of Government and Parliament.

Or a time when scientific advice has been more necessary.

Or its influence more crucial.

Over the course of history Governments have been advised and influenced by philosophers, lawyers, diplomats, academics, journalists and economists – and more recently by single issue pressure groups, by environmental and non-government organisations and by others.

All these still have a role to play.

But the issues that face Governments and Legislators around the world now involve science, engineering and technology to a more pervasive extent than ever before.

Science is now a top priority. Here in the UK the fundamental issues that face Government and Parliament, and the decisions on what to do about them, still remain essentially political decisions. But scientific advice is both needed and required.

Operating under its Royal Charter “to serve the public interest” the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) undertakes a wide range of activities designed to offer assistance to MPs and Peers given that so many of the issues they face have a scientific aspect.

### **Parliamentary Briefings**

The RSC provides direct assistance to MPs including briefings for Ministerial Statements or general debates on scientific issues, for use at Committee or Report Stage, PQs and Adjournment Debates.

*“I want to pay a compliment to the Royal Society of Chemistry, which has probably inundated hon. Members with information about the research that it is doing... through its skilled membership.”*

*[Dr Ian Gibson MP]*

### **Parliamentary Links Day**

The RSC has for decades run the pioneering (and since imitated) *Parliamentary Link Scheme* – which brings together members of the Society with the MPs in whose constituencies they live – and this scheme remains at the heart of the Society’s strategic efforts to build bridges between the scientific community and Parliament.

*Parliamentary Links Day* remains the largest scientific event held annually in the Houses of Parliament and involves the active participation of sister organisations such as the Institute of Physics, the Institute of Biology, the Royal Society, the Royal Academy of Engineering, the Campaign for Science and Engineering, the Geological Society and many others.

Science is multi-disciplinary, the solutions to many problems are multi-disciplinary, and over the years *Parliamentary Links Day* has evolved accordingly.

In recent years major themes – such as *Science and the G8 Summit* and *Science and Globalisation* – have been explored by key figures including the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, senior Cabinet and Shadow Cabinet Ministers, the Government’s Chief Scientific Adviser, the Chairs of major Select Committees and world renowned scientists and engineers.

### **RSC Westminster Fellowship**

The Society runs a three month funded placement for young scientists working in the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology. This ‘injects some chemistry directly into the bloodstream of Parliament.’

### **Devolution**

The RSC continues to pioneer scientific links with devolved bodies, and has already developed new Link Schemes between the scientific community and Members both of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly.

In Scotland the Society and the Royal Society of Edinburgh work jointly to make available to MSPs the wide-

ranging knowledge and expertise that both organisations offer. The annual *Science and the Parliament* event (now in its 8th year) attracts over 300 delegates and 30 exhibitors and provides an ideal opportunity for networking between the political and scientific communities.

In Wales relationships have been enhanced by the establishment of the annual *Science and the Assembly* event which now provides a welcome opportunity to debate key science issues and to meet scientists and engineers.

*“My Hon. Friend will know that I was at the recent Bill Bryson awards launch from the Royal Society of Chemistry, a terrific programme encouraging young people to take an interest in science.*

*We want more people to be excited about science.”*

*[Ian Pearson MP]*

### **The Role of Scientific Advice**

Scientific advice and how it is organised always matters. There are limits to the advice that the Government can obtain solely from its own resources and it needs to tap the wealth of expertise that lies within the scientific community.

Governments have to make decisions and the scientific community has to understand the pressures and constraints that it faces.

The scientific community now has a greater opportunity – and responsibility – than ever before to ensure that it provides the best possible scientific advice in the most timely and understandable way.

Some of the world’s most important challenges – including global climate change, and how to ensure plentiful supplies of energy, food and clean water – are the very ones where the scientific community has the most to offer. Science is part of the solution.

And the Royal Society of Chemistry is here to help.