

# NEW GOVERNMENT, NEW PARLIAMENT, NEW PEOPLE, SAME ISSUES

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## THE IET

The electorate spoke, the parties discussed, the coalition was formed. A remarkable change has occurred in how the UK is governed. Just as remarkable was the number of new MPs elected to Parliament, with over a third of MPs being replaced. So the UK now has a new type of Government and Parliament is buzzing with newly elected Members. What else has changed?

Unfortunately the problems facing the country haven't changed and the need to solve them in a timely and efficient way has never been so important. Engineering hasn't changed and is still at the heart of raising living standards and solving problems. What has changed is the way in which the profession engages with Government and Parliament. Over the past two years, the profession has taken to heart the criticism it received from the Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Select Committee that the sheer number of engineering institutions was a barrier to government engagement. The profession has been working actively to form an alliance to offer a single voice and point of contact for Government and Parliament. Running under the banner Engineering the Future (EtF), the alliance is made up of Royal Academy of Engineering, Engineering UK, the Engineering Council, the Institution of Engineering and Technology, the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, the Institution of Civil Engineers, the Institution of Chemical Engineers and the Institute of Physics. The alliance represents a joint membership of over 450,000 professionals.

Engineering the Future seeks to co-ordinate the profession's work with government, for example with joint consultation submissions and interactions with Government departments on specific issues, such as the adaptation of infrastructure to climate change. EtF also engages with Parliament. With such an influx of new blood into Parliament, EtF thought that it would be useful to run a parliamentary event, providing MPs with an opportunity to be briefed on engineering's role in the UK and how EtF can help them.

The briefing took place on the rather warm morning of the 30th June in Westminster Hall. All MPs were invited and around 40 MPs and Peers registered an interest in attending. The briefing was hosted by Prof. Christopher Snowden, President of the IET and Vice-President of the Royal Academy of Engineering, with speeches by Andrew Miller MP and Kate Bellingham, the National STEM Careers Coordinator.

During his opening speech Andrew Miller emphasised the need to include the engineering community in relevant policy discussions. Observing previous examples of policy where engineers were not consulted, such as the development of eco-towns, Mr. Miller said: "Engineering advice is of great relevance to parliamentarians. Expertise must be sought, valued and used by the cabinet." Professor Snowden reiterated the value of involving the engineering community in policy discussions at an early stage, saying: "Engineering advice has historically not been sought early enough in the policy process. Regrettably governments are still learning to take engineering and science expertise on board. We need to develop a stronger dialogue between engineering and Parliament and continue to reinvigorate interest and understanding amongst parliamentarians."

Speaking on a related issue, Kate Bellingham highlighted the need to encourage more young people into engineering to ensure that the country had the right skills for the future. Engineering has long suffered from a poor image, with a subsequent knock on effect on recruitment. It is often seen as a poorly paid, unattractive profession; however the reality is far different. Engineering offers a broad, creative and exciting career and a recent survey revealed that four out of the top ten highest graduate salaries are in engineering subjects. Ms Bellingham noted: "In schools we must reinforce the message that science and maths open doors and reinforce the positive and sometimes hidden messages about engineering. Engineering is vital to the future of the UK." She challenged MPs to promote the positive aspects of a career in engineering to their constituents.

It was good to see that a number of the new MPs attended the briefing and many people commented on how engaged the MPs were on key topics, ranging from local issues such as engineering employment and training to the big national problems such as energy and transport. The problems may be old, but this is the beginning of the engineering profession's fresh engagement with the new Parliament to demonstrate the importance of engineering to the UK.

