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It is great to note that since I last wrote, the UK has won yet another Nobel Prize – our eighth in the last decade. Tomas Lindahl received a share in the Prize for Physiology/Medicine for his work on DNA repair. In all humility we need to remember that Professor Lindahl was born in Sweden and came to the UK as an immigrant in his 20's.

As it happens, another recent UK winner (and now President

of the Royal Society) was also an immigrant in his 20's Sir Venkatraman (Venki) Ramakrishnan (Chemistry, 2009). The (Physics 2010) Nobel prize winners for discovering graphene were Russians by birth who did their work at the University of Manchester.

All these illustrate points tackled at a P&SC meeting in 2013 (report in Science in Parliament, Spring 2014). Science knows no national boundaries, and the UK is a very attractive place in which to pursue scientific research.

We never cease to coax the Home Office to accept these facts, and base immigration policy accordingly. In fact they have just relaxed the regulations on students coming to Britain.

The question of why the UK is so attractive is worth examining. Speaking English obviously helps. Reasonably well funded, thanks to never ending pressure from Learned Bodies and individuals, is also a sine qua non. Perhaps

too our tolerance of challenges to authority and the establishment sets us slightly apart. Look at the reputation of the British sense of humour and satire.

John Gurdon (Nobel Laureate, Physiology 2012) remains proud of his school report which declared that he would never be a success as a scientist because he was always challenging given theories and opinions.

That is one reason why the Haldane Principal, enunciated 100 years ago, was first promulgated. Scientists welcome challenges to established laws and theories. Politicians are usually more content with the status quo.

Governments will of course continue to determine budgets, but they need to let scientists get on with the job of determining scientific priorities.

Perhaps the centenary is an appropriate time to review this relationship?



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1. to inform the scientific and industrial communities of activities within Parliament of a scientific nature and of the progress of relevant legislation;
2. to keep Members of Parliament abreast of scientific affairs.

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