PARLIAMENTARY LINKS DAY 2014
Science and Public Trust

The Attlee Suite was once again filled to capacity with MPs, Peers, scientists and engineers– standing room only from the start – for this year's Parliamentary Links Day at the House of Commons on the theme of *Science and Public Trust*.

> **"The Society is to be congratulated for its initiative and leadership in organising today's event on behalf of the wider science and engineering community"**
>
> Rt Hon John Bercow MP
> Speaker of the House of Commons

There was a stellar array of speakers and for connoisseurs of *Twitter* this year's #LinksDay2014 was *trending* by 11.30am – a new record!

The Speaker of the House Rt Hon John Bercow MP – a steadfast supporter of science –

launched the event as he has done throughout this Parliament.

He also included a poignant dedication to the work and scientific interests of the former MP Rt Hon Tony Benn who died in March and who had been a longstanding supporter of Links Day since its beginning.

Links Day remains the largest science event of its kind on the annual Parliamentary calendar and is sponsored on a tripartite basis by Andrew Miller MP, Stephen Metcalfe MP and Dr Julian Huppert MP. Organised by

the Society of Biology on behalf of the science and engineering community Links Day promotes links and understanding between the worlds of Science, Parliament and Government.

This year's format included a mixture of keynote speeches and panel discussions. The speakers explored the importance of effectively engaging UK citizens with science and policy.

The two panels were made up

of science journalists, academics and scientific organisations. They discussed the need for a stronger engagement with the public on scientific issues, and stressed the value of a strong connection between both Parliament and the Sciences in all capacities to advance policy making.

Discussion ranged around trust between scientists and politicians, scientists and the public and politicians and the public. There was agreement that trust is a two-way thing and that there is a need for all sides to engage honestly, moving from 'telling' to 'discussing' issues.

In his Keynote address Sir Mark Walport, the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser, discussed the planned development of a fast stream

specifically aimed at Science and Engineering Civil servants in order to bridge the gap for the scientists of the future, as well as the importance of the social sciences in relation to policy issues. He encouraged the room to engage with policy at local and national levels to continue integrating science effectively.

The two Panels were chaired by Stephen Metcalfe MP and Dr Julian Huppert MP.

The contributors on Julian Huppert's Panel included Nicola

Gulley (the Editorial Director of IOP Publishing), Mark Henderson (Head of Communications at the Wellcome Trust), Terry Lyons (Council for the Mathematical Sciences) and James Wilsdon (from the Science Policy Research Unit at the University of Sussex).

The contributors on Stephen Metcalfe's Panel were Fiona Fox (Director of the Science Media Centre), Pallab Ghosh (BBC Science Correspondent), Sarah Main (Director of the Campaign for Science and Engineering), Martin Pickersgill (Royal Society of Edinburgh), and Chris Tyler (Director of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology).

The Panel debates at the event (and across Twitter) were lively question and answer sessions that addressed topics such as the lack of funding organisations for post-graduate training,

increasing productivity, global collaborations, inspiring young minds and most importantly constantly and consistently engaging with the public.

The political contributions to Links Day were made by Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP, Shadow Minister for Universities, Science & Skills and by Paul Uppal MP, PPS to the Minister of Universities and Science, who spoke at lunch as Rt Hon David Willetts MP was unavoidably absent on official business overseas. Mr Uppal pointed to

the strong support that had been given to science by the Government over the years since 2010.

Liam Byrne launched the Labour Party's new Green Paper on science policy *Agenda 2030: One Nation Labour's Plan for Science and Innovation* and set out fresh House of Commons library research revealing the state of Britain's knowledge economy – including the falling Government and business investment in R&D and the falling number of people working in 'scientific research and development'– and argued that urgent change was needed to create a high-skilled workforce, stronger universities and a better environment for R&D investment. He added that

> **"I am glad to support Parliamentary Links Day and I congratulate the Society of Biology on its continuing efforts to bring science into Parliament."**
>
> Rt Hon David Cameron MP
> Prime Minister

after the consultation process a detailed White Paper on Labour's science policy would be published later in the year.

Sir Paul Nurse, President of the Royal Society, gave the closing Keynote Address and highlighted two aspects of trust in science . The first was what is it about science which means that it should be trusted? And the second was which scientists and scientific organisations should be trusted to give good advice about science to society and its democratic institutions?

Sir Paul argued that Science should be trusted because "it can generate reliable knowledge about the natural world and ourselves." This is because of the way that Science is done and because Science has a number of attributes not all unique to Science, but when put together make it a reliable and self-correcting process of generating knowledge.

> **This House congratulates the Society of Biology and… welcomes the Society's continuing commitment to serve the public interest by improving the access of all hon. Members to scientific information and a better understanding of science."**
>
> Early Day Motion 145
> Tabled 19 June 2014

He ended with a memorable plea. "Better discussion and engagement about science with the public will lead to more trust in science, and in my view this will be increasingly important for a healthy democracy. There is a job here for both parliamentarians and scientists, which is why Parliamentary Links Days such as this are so important."

The text of Sir Paul's Keynote Address is available at http://blogs.royalsociety.org/in-verba/2014/06/26/paul-nurse-speaks-on-trust-in-science/

> **"Parliament needs a working dialogue with the scientific community and I know that the Society of Biology and other societies work tirelessly to provide MPs with access to information and advice.**
>
> Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP
> Leader of the Opposition

BSI Resources Parliamentary Links - British Society for Immunology
The Society of Biology demonstrated its heft in bringing together a heavyweight set of panellists and speakers for this latest Parliamentary Links Day

Pallab Ghosh @BBCPallab
Speaker praises late Tony Benn's passion for science great impersonation of him #linksday2014

Wellcome Education @WTeducation
Wellcome trust monitor data shows the public does trust scientists, much more than politicians http://wellcome.ac.uk/monitor @markgfh #linksday2014

Dr Suze Kundu @FunSizeSuze
If we want to understand public engagement, we need social science. YES! Complimentary.

Not a competition. @uksciencechief #Links Day 2014

SciTechCom @CommonsSTC @uksciencechief calls for more scientists and engineers to stand for parliament. Any volunteers? #linksday2014 #scipolicy

Society of Biology @Society_Biology
Events like #LinksDay2014 make a huge impact on MPs says @liambyrnemp

Society of Biology @Society_Biology
@drsarahmain from @sciencecampaign explains the importance of respecting that MPs are busy and using time with them wisely. #linksday2014

SciTechCom @CommonsSTC @SteveMetcalfeMP: if you don't like something, tell us! @sciencecampaign raised issue of practical science, we responded. #linksday2014

SciTechCom @CommonsSTC For all those inspired to engage with parliament, keep an eye on our website for some announcements over the next week or two. #linksday2014