SCIENCE IN PARLIAMENT

The Journal of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee.

The Committee is an Associate Parliamentary Group of members of both Houses of Parliament and British members of the European Parliament, representatives of scientific and technical institutions, industrial organisations and universities.

Science in Parliament has two main objectives:
a) to inform the scientific and industrial communities of activities within Parliament of a scientific nature and of the progress of relevant legislation;
b) to keep Members of Parliament abreast of scientific affairs.

The Parliamentary and Scientific Committee

Why, when CSR07 increased the budget for the Science & Technology Facilities Council by 13.6%, do they find themselves with an £80 million shortfall in their budget? Application of Full Economic Costs to research grants is being blamed in part, but all the Research Councils are facing that problem. And, why are the Research Councils, who will now provide 80% of FECs, having to find the full amount when other budgets were finding some of these costs previously?

The fact is that the future of Daresbury, a science and innovation campus, is at risk for the second time. If the science disappears off that site, will companies be attracted to set up business there? Changes in the STFC budget appear to be hitting physics departments in universities too. There are a lot of questions to answer.

There have been some excellent debates in the House of Lords on the Human Fertility and Embryology Bill, with the Bill remaining largely intact, even regarding research on 'human admixed embryos' (or cytoplasmic hybrid embryos, as they were previously known). But, why has the Human Fertility and Embryology Authority decided to grant two licences for research in this area before the HoC has even debated the Bill? The HoL has not got embroiled in the abortion debate.

Scientists at the University of Manchester have developed a way of altering the structure of calcium-dependent lipopeptide antibiotics that could lead to novel drugs that are active against superbugs such as MRSA and C. difficile, and others at the John Innes Centre have developed a decoy system for the enzymes released by bacteria that destroy antibiotics, so that existing antibiotics can remain effective.

Today, more than 200 biological medicines, mainly large complex protein molecules, are produced by the biotechnology industry. However, unlike generic copies of conventional drugs, follow-on products in this area of medicine cannot produce products that are identical to the innovator drugs. This raises some problems that are discussed in this edition of SiP.

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Science in Parliament

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Spring 2008 Volume 65 Number 1

ISSN 0263-6271