

Voice of the Future 2016

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Strong relationships between politicians and scientists are crucial to a healthy and productive science policy environment. One of the ways to encourage these conversations is through running events such as Voice of the Future, where young researchers get to ask questions of prominent figures in the Government and Parliament. This year's event involved Jo Johnson MP (Science and Universities Minister), Yvonne Fovargue MP (Shadow Science Minister), Sir Mark Walport (Chief Scientific Advisor) and Nicola Blackwood MP (Chair of the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee), with fellow Committee members acting as witnesses. The questions from young scientists covered a great range of topics: open access and publication ethics, antimicrobial resistance, the use of scientific evidence, immigration, careers in STEM and diversity.

The event is a great opportunity for students and early career researchers to get a glimpse of science policy in practice and see how a Select Committee normally conducts their evidence sessions. Each participating

Society had the chance to send several members to represent them at the event. We were represented by six bright young scientists from across the country: Kiani Jeacock, a student at the University of Liverpool, Melanie Panagi, a PhD student at the University of Bristol, Connor Rogerson, a PhD student at the University of Manchester, Constantine Simintiras, a PostDoc at the University of Hull, Merrick Strotton, a PhD student at King's College London and Matthew Wilkinson, an undergraduate student at Newcastle University.

Constantine asked Sir Mark Walport how important scientific evidence was considered against other forms of evidence in arriving at policy decisions. Walport responded by talking about three 'lenses' that a policy maker needs to look through when making decisions: first, the evidence at hand, second, whether the policy is realistic and can be delivered, and third, societal, political and other values that are involved. His answer illustrated how complicated policy making usually is and how thoughtful it should be.



Constantine Simintiras, PostDoc at the University of Hull



Matthew Wilkinson, undergraduate student at Newcastle University



Melanie Panagi, PhD student at the University of Bristol



Major Tim Peake, answering questions from Nicola Blackwood MP and Jo Johnson MP. He was also the first ever witness to speak in front of Parliament from space

Melanie asked whether the salary threshold for non-EEA immigrants applying for a Tier 2 visa to do science research in the UK should be reduced from the current £35,000. Yvonne Fovargue MP answered this question by saying that science is a global industry and we need to make sure the UK attracts the best talent in the world.

Careers in science and diversity came up at each of the four panel discussions, highlighting how important this issue is for scientists and politicians alike. MPs spoke about the need for flexible careers, which would make it easier for people coming back after career breaks, including those with childcare responsibilities. It was

stressed several times that childcare should be seen as a parenting and not a maternity issue, and that men need to be involved in these discussions as well.

The highlight of the event for most people was a video message from Major Tim Peake from the International Space Station, during which he answered questions from Nicola Blackwood MP and Jo Johnson MP. It was great to be greeted by Major Tim Peake and hear him speak about his experiments and the future of space exploration. He was also the first ever witness to speak in front of Parliament from space. "Major Tim Peake said he believed "the future of scientific exploration lies in space", and looked forward to our future trips to the moon and Mars.

After the event Constantine said: "I applied because the event seemed truly unique, a great opportunity to visit Parliament and interact with key policy makers. In addition to the opportunity to pose a direct question to Professor Sir Mark Walport, I thoroughly enjoyed meeting new peers from other Societies with whom I hope to stay in touch. I most enjoyed observing science from an entirely new angle, there appears to be much that goes on to advance scientific progress outside of the lab".

Melanie added: "Taking part in Voice of the Future event was a really enlightening experience, not only in terms of the questions that were asked, but also being able to learn more about how policy is dictated and the array of people involved".

We are pleased that our members had such a great opportunity to experience science policy first hand and look forward to the next year's event. ■

EU Referendum

The outcome of the EU Referendum will undoubtedly have a considerable impact upon the molecular bioscience community, and the greater science sector. Following a review by the Trustees of the Society, to ensure compliance with charity legislation, the Biochemical Society will not take a position on either outcome of the referendum during the campaigning period.

In February 2016 the Biochemical Society released a survey to capture people's views and experiences of the impact of EU membership on UK molecular bioscience. We were delighted with the enthusiastic response to the questionnaire and would like to thank those who took part. Unfortunately, due to the above, we are not able to use the results of this research during the campaigning period. However, we would like to take this opportunity to reassure respondents that the valuable data obtained during this survey will be used to inform future science policy work undertaken by the Society alone, and in collaboration with other organisations. Additionally, following the closure of the campaigning period, the Society will make available the findings of the survey for download from the website. A further bulletin will be provided at this time.