



Alexa Hime (Science Education Manager)

## Inspiring the scientists of tomorrow by taking leading scientists into schools

# high-sci



The new 'High-Sci' project is a series of evening lectures in secondary schools, run as satellite events to the Society's programme of Focused Meetings. The aim of the new scheme is to engage children with science, through meeting a real-life working scientist. The lectures will provide students first with the scientific knowledge on the chosen topic and information on what research is currently being done in the area, and, more importantly, the aims and achievements of this research and how it effects life today and tomorrow. In doing this, the hope is that the students will feel excited about studying the biological sciences and understand the important partnership between research and future developments. This in turn may help recruit and inspire some of scientists of tomorrow.

The collaboration with the Conference Office is essential to this project and has helped get it off to a great start. The Focused Meetings are part of the larger conference scheme run by the Society and bring together the leading scientists working in the area. With the support of the conference organizers, a dynamic and exciting speaker is chosen to work with the Education Department on a schools lecture. A link is then established with a nearby school, providing a second layer of education to the conference through scientific engagement with the younger people of the local area. Not only the prominent scientists in the area and the young researchers can enhance their knowledge of the molecular biosciences through networking and talks, but also the local community.

### Reporting back

The first event of the High-Sci series was held at Monk's Walk School in Hertfordshire, in January 2010. The lecture was run in conjunction with the Focused Meeting held at GlaxoSmithKline entitled 'Revolutionizing Drug Discovery with Stem Cell Technology'. The scientific organizers of the meeting, Katy Gearing (GlaxoSmithKline, UK), Melanie Welham (University of Bath, UK) and Aaron Chuang (GlaxoSmithKline, USA) were quick to recommend Sir Ian Wilmut as our first speaker, who was more than happy to accept the challenge. Katy Gearing, a parent at the local school, reported:

"At the end of two exhausting days of cutting edge science, it was a huge pleasure to accompany Sir Ian Wilmut to a public lecture held in a school a few miles from the conference venue. The lecture gave a very positive message about stem cell research, full of hope for what might be possible in the decades to come, but lacking the hype and sensationalism often associated with this field. The audience hung on Sir Ian's every word and he was deluged with questions. For the students, there was a real sense that they were sharing the start of something big, the beginning of a new era in science and medicine. As a parent living in the age of the *X Factor* it was wonderful to see my own children, who were also in the audience, in awe of someone famous for his scientific achievement. The experience is one the school will not forget in a hurry and hopefully it has helped inspire a handful of students to think about pursuing a career in medical science."

### Proven results

Andrew Probert, a science teacher at Monk's Walk School and the main contact for helping make the event a success, said the lecture was the talk of the school . . .

"We had lots of positive comments back from students, parents and members of the public. It was the talk of the corridors on the days immediately

after the event and gave rise to some quite detailed discussions in A Level and GCSE Biology classes. Of the nearly 40 students that attended, all said that they had really enjoyed the event and some (ten) even indicated that this was an area that they wanted to find out more about and research. All the comments from those attending the event were positive.

“The students clearly relished the chance to meet a leading scientist and gained more than just an understanding of stem cell research, but also something of the drive, passion and commitment that it takes to make scientific breakthroughs”

From the Society’s point of view, this is the best outcome we could have hoped for, learning that pupils were excited to meet a scientist working on current cutting-edge science, leaving them with a positive out-look on continuing their studies in the biological sciences. This outcome supports the findings of a report by the National Foundation for Educational Research, commissioned by the Royal Society of Chemistry in 2006<sup>1</sup>. The report found that, although websites and career advisors were often young people’s most common sources of careers information, external people were considered particularly ‘trustworthy’ sources, with a particular preference to information from ‘those in the know’. We hope this is where the High-Sci talks will provide an invaluable experience to the students.

### Plans for the future

We hope that we can help encourage more pupils to attend the events, helping the host school market the event to multiple nearby schools at a time.

The lectures are part of an ongoing plan to take part in more collaborative projects with the Society’s Conference Office. The success of the first of the schools lecture has demonstrated the potential increased outreach that is possible when working across the Society



Sir Ian Wilmut with Philip Bunn (Head Teacher at Monk’s Walk School) and Edward Hutchings (Head of Science, Monk’s Walk School)

with one goal: to engage the future scientists of tomorrow. At the time of writing, planning for the next topics was well underway, including ‘Enzymology’ and ‘Dementia’.

### Get involved

The schools lectures are a great way of reaching large amounts of students and working towards the advancement of molecular science through education. If you would like to get involved by running your own project or event, why not apply for one of our Scientific Outreach Grants? The Society welcomes applications for projects aimed at communicating the excitement of molecular bioscience to young scientists at school, college, university and in the community, to help develop their interests and skills in science. The grant can assist with the direct costs associated with an event and expenses incurred, such as transport, extra materials or even teacher cover. Possible ideas can include a lecture of your own, or an experiment or workshop using novel approaches to investigating molecular science. Further information can be found on the Society’s website ([www.biochemistry.org/grants](http://www.biochemistry.org/grants)).

Alternatively, if you think your job could excite students about biochemistry and provide them with an insight into biochemistry today, you can get the word out by taking part in one of our case studies. If you would like to get involved, please contact [education@biochemistry.org](mailto:education@biochemistry.org). ■

### References

1. Lord, P., Harland, J.L. and Gulliver, C. (2006) An Evaluation of the Royal Society of Chemistry Careers Materials, Royal Society of Chemistry, London