

Britain's Younger Researchers – Taking Real Science to Parliament

Eric Wharton, SET for BRITAIN

After several years of organising successful Science Weeks in the Thames Valley, I said to Robert Jackson, my MP at that time, “How about taking a few younger researchers to the House of Commons to enable them to present their work there?”. Robert replied, “an excellent idea, let’s do it”. Realistically I anticipated that we would be doing well to get fifty applicants, however we had 350 in that first year! I had previously discovered Brian Iddon MP in one of our early Science Weeks on the chemistry “lecture-demonstration” circuit, prior to his election in 1997 and I therefore brought him in as Co-Sponsor.

Twenty-two such Receptions have now been held, according to those responsible for providing the exhibition boards, aided by enthusiastic Sponsoring Members and Champions at Westminster including Robert Jackson MP, Dr Brian Iddon MP, Claire Curtis-Thomas MP, Dr Doug Naysmith MP, Dr Evan Harris MP, Richard Page MP, Ed Vaizey MP and Dr Ian Gibson MP.

It is very encouraging to realise that Britain’s younger researchers continue to appreciate this opportunity to discuss and present their research at Westminster to about fifty Members and a few Peers, who visit the posters and their presenters and who are impressed and thrilled by Britain’s future scientific leaders.

The basic objectives of these Receptions are as follows:

- Presenting “ground-breaking” research and R&D at Westminster
- Encouraging better personal interaction between researchers

- Fostering greater interactive dialogue between younger researchers and Members in Westminster and in their Constituencies
- Competing for a prestigious Medal and Prize for the best poster representing the best research

Many researchers gain an awareness of the challenges and excitement in other areas of research, possibly resulting in collaborative projects. They receive a brief introduction to Parliament and discover also how Parliament deals with science, engineering, medicine and technology.

The more adventurous may strike up relationships with Members and invite them to their laboratory or to their local pub. Members are often enthused by the commitment and dedication of the researchers, many of whom are working on topical or societal problems leading to a better world. A national Competition for a Medal and a Prize is an important aspect of each Reception – some of the Prizes are at the £5,000 level, which was introduced by Richard Page MP for the younger engineers’

Reception. Very substantial Prizes are awarded in literature and art, so why not in science? The awards are for the merit and quality of research and all presenters are also encouraged to discuss the benefits of their work in relation to Science and Society and to demonstrate any ethical, societal and commercial implications.

Three Receptions have been held in the previous six months:

The fifth annual **Reception for younger engineers** was held on 6 December 2005 (Dr Douglas Naysmith MP and supported by BP, ExxonMobil, BNFL, Rolls-Royce, Vodafone, RWenpower, Thames Water, Royal Academy of Engineering – 110 posters). **Daniel Walker**, a research student from Oxford University, was the winner of the 2005 Gold Medal and the £5,000 Prize for his research which is relevant to the oil and gas industry, relating to the interaction of extreme ocean waves with offshore structures.

The **Annual SET Week Reception** was held on 13 March 2006 (Dr Brian Iddon MP and supported by GlaxoSmithKline – 260 posters) for



8 May 2006 Bioscience Reception Prize-Winners with Dr Evan Harris M.P.



Dr Brian Iddon M.P. with 13 March 2006 Lunchtime Prizewinners

Britain's younger researchers from any branch of SET/STEM. **Dr Christopher Mee** of the MRC at Oxford University and **Richard Page** of Cambridge University won the 2006 Westminster Medal and £1,000 Prize for their work on using a simple invertebrate research model (*Drosophila melanogaster*) to mimic the effect of A β , peptide accumulation found in the brains of Alzheimer's Disease patients. **Dr Carolyn Moores** of Birkbeck College won the 2006 De Montfort Medal and £1,000 Prize for research using electron microscopy to observe brain development and to describe the consequences of failure to develop correctly.

A Reception for UK Bioscience took place on 8 May 2006 (Dr Evan Harris MP and supported by ABPI, BBSRC and MRC and others – 170 posters). There is rapid growth in bioscience, biomedicine and medicine in the UK. **Leanne Bellamy** from Imperial College won the 2006 Mendel Medal and £5,000 Prize for her thorough review of existing literature (2.6 million women) which found that women who had pre-eclampsia were twice as likely to develop heart attacks, strokes, blood clots and high blood pressure in later life, about 10 years after their affected pregnancy. The Runner-Up was **Dr Ian Prior** of Liverpool University, who uses

novel techniques with the electron microscope to investigate previously invisible cell surface features. These provide information that help in understanding how diet and viruses such as HIV affect cell surfaces.

SET for BRITAIN's overall aim is to encourage, support and promote Britain's younger scientists, engineers and technologists. This is the "engine-room" of progress in research and R&D which is the cornerstone of maintaining and developing the UK economy and the health and quality of life of the UK people – and is a vital resource, asset and investment for the UK. These Receptions are only one, but

a very important one, of the SET or STEM activities held in the Houses of Parliament every year.

Thanks are due to the Sponsoring MPs, and the organisations referred to above and others such as NERC, PPARC, EPSRC, IOP and many Members, the Poster Judges, learned societies and associations and staff of the House of Commons for their help and encouragement with these Receptions.

Forthcoming Receptions:

Younger Physicists (Ed Vaizey MP, Lunchtime on 28 November 2006, the 2006 Cavendish Medal and Prize)

Younger Engineers (Dr Doug Naysmith MP, Lunchtime on 12 December 2006, the 2006 Gold Medal for Excellence in Engineering and £5,000 Prize)

Younger SET/STEM Researchers (Dr Brian Iddon MP, Lunchtime and Evening on 19 March 2007, the 2007 Westminster and De Montfort Medals and Prizes)

UK Bioscience (Dr Evan Harris MP, Lunchtime on 14 May 2007, the 2007 Mendel Medal and £5,000 Prize)

There will also be important Runner-Up Prizes for each Reception.



Dr Brian Iddon M.P. with Dr Carolyn Moores (De Montfort Medallist) and Cuauhtemoc Rodriguez (Millennium Medallist) at 13 March Evening Reception

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By "science", this generally means science, engineering, technology, medicine
Photographs courtesy of Frank Dumbleton

Promoting Britain's Younger Scientists, Engineers and Technologists at the House of Commons



Presentations at House of Commons by Britain's Top Younger Scientists, Engineers and Technologists

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