

18 July 2008

GOVERNMENT CALLS ON SOCIETY TO HAVE ITS SAY ON SCIENCE

Promoting public engagement on increasingly complex science issues and encouraging more people to choose science as a career are the key issues to be tackled by a consultation starting today.

The consultation to develop a Science and Society Strategy was launched by the Minister for Science and Innovation, Ian Pearson at Thinktank in the Birmingham Science Museum. The initiative aims to capture a range of views from the general public, scientists, businesses, media, education and government. It seeks input on three key areas:

- How to improve communication, generate interest, increase participation and convey the relevance of science;
- How to build trust and confidence in scientific research in the public and private sectors; and
- How to inspire young people from diverse backgrounds to become tomorrow's skilled scientists.

Mr Pearson said:

“Science improves the quality of our daily life, underpins the UK's prosperity and will play a key role in meeting the challenges facing the world in the 21st century. The aim of this consultation is to ensure the public are engaged on scientific issues to enable them to make informed choices in this age of

information overload. A society that understands double-blind testing, the process of peer review and the evaluation of risk. A society that can be awe-struck by science, but never dumb-struck.

“There is a need for businesses to engage with society on science. The private sector has a responsibility to improve public trust in the science it uses and funds. One of the key questions of the consultation will be to ask what more can be done to foster public confidence in science and industry.

“Engaging young people is also an important step on the road to ensuring the UK has a skilled scientific workforce. The consultation will explore how both the Government and business can best inspire young people and support them in a scientific career.”

In what is believed to be the first website of its type for a Government consultation, an online hub has been established to capture the feedback. It features discussion forums, videos and an interactive consultation document allowing visitors to respond to individual questions or the entire strategy.

Developing a Science and Society strategy fit for 2008 and beyond is a key part of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills' (DIUS) ten year Science and Innovation Framework 2004-14.

Promoting the benefits of public engagement in science, as well as delivering science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills in line with employer demand is also one of the Department's strategic objectives in the 2008-09 business plan.

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Notes for Editors

1. An interactive online hub has been created to host the consultation and capture responses. See <http://interactive.dius.gov.uk/scienceandsociety> for more information.
2. Ian Pearson's speech will be available online from 11.30am at <http://www.dius.gov.uk/speeches/index.html>
3. Written responses to the consultation should be addressed to scienceandsociety@dius.gsi.gov.uk or Science and Society, DIUS, Kingsgate House, 66-74 Victoria Street London SW1E 6SW.
4. The consultation will run until October 17, 2008. Publication of the final strategy and implementation plan will be towards the end of the year.
5. For media enquiries, contact Rhys Stacker in the DIUS press office on 0203 300 8105 or 0779 542 7054.

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