As this issue of The Biochemist goes to press, the votes are being counted in one of the most extraordinary elections in recent years. Whatever flavour of new Government emerges from the general election, one thing is certain: they will not be over-endowed with scientific expertise. Partly as a fall out from the expenses scandal, the number of parliamentarians standing down at this election is significant. The result, however the electorate votes, will mean at least 300 new MPs. Only a handful has any background in science. The scientific community will need to support these members and nurture an empathy with others to ensure the importance of science to our economy, health, the environment and social infrastructure is not lost.

They will need to be engaged in the issues rather than lectured to, and, above all, we need to avoid the trap of special pleading. The new Government, and backbenchers alike, need to hear a simple and consistent message about the value of science. The science budget must continue to be ring-fenced, and the amount within it at least maintained. If we can win the wider argument, biology has a strong heritage to call on to ensure that the life sciences are not undervalued.

The Society of Biology is taking every opportunity to lobby. We have written to each parliamentary candidate to raise the profile of biology and the role of the Society, but with a clear focus on the bigger picture. We are highlighting three key messages.

1. **Recognition of the central role of science in the economy**, by maintaining or increasing funding for basic and applied research in real terms. We are calling on the new Government to develop a new 10-year funding framework for science, to underpin the UK’s position as a world-leading scientific nation.

2. **The importance of practical as well as theoretical skills in the training of scientists**. This will require financial support for a significant hands-on practical skills element, including laboratory and field skills in courses at school and university. School teachers should be enabled and supported to provide high-quality laboratory and outdoor practical science teaching at all levels. We argue that particular attention is paid to this in forthcoming curriculum reviews.

3. **The need to intensify efforts to ensure that scientific evidence is well used and communicated across Government**. This is necessary to improve policy development and delivery where issues cross traditional departmental responsibilities. We recommend inclusion of principles guaranteeing academic freedom of scientific advisers in the ministerial code.

There are further, more detailed, arguments to make about equality of funding between the sciences, pointing out the absolute necessity of ensuring that UK biology is funded in a way that enables us to retain our world-leading position. But it would be a mistake to lead the debate with special pleading for the biosciences. We need new parliamentarians to more fully understand the wide value of public financial support for UK science as a whole.

The recent Question Time-style debate organized by the Royal Society of Chemistry in partnership with the Society and others, between the science spokesmen for the three main parties – Adam Afriyie (Conservative), Lord Drayson (Labour) and Evan Harris (Liberal Democrat) – did highlight some policy differences. And it is right to provide them with more of the detail, focusing on biology. But they at least have a good overview of the issues. It will be the lack of science understanding across key ministerial posts and parliamentary committees that is likely to lead to misunderstanding or lack of urgency.

The Society will be working hard to build relationships with MPs and Peers post-election, pushing them on their science policy and seeking to represent biology on behalf of our membership. We will develop a range of case studies on the impact of biology to support the detailed arguments and we welcome your input. But the more MPs that hear the same message, the more likely it is that we will succeed. We encourage you to write to your local MP with these messages and stand ready to offer support wherever possible.

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