

We all can probably remember being asked at some time or other, 'Why do science?' or, more philosophically perhaps, to justify the teaching of science as part of the curriculum. Regardless of our own particular point of view, it is difficult to respond to either challenge without acknowledging the fact that one reason for doing science is the economic one – that UK plc needs scientists, engineers and technologists. The demand is not only for individuals working at the leading edge of research and development, but also for significant numbers of people working as technicians and skilled crafts-persons. Concern over the number of young people going into careers in science, engineering or technology has been expressed repeatedly over the last few years. Indeed, in the short time that I have been in post at ASE, I think I have heard it expressed at least twice a week in one meeting or another.

The Roberts' Review argued that action is needed by the Government, businesses and others in scientific and technical fields to ensure that pupils (especially girls) receive accurate and positive advice about the rewards of (and breadth of careers arising from) studying science and engineering. Clearly, one of the factors influencing the career choice of young people is their experience in school and the advice they receive both formally through careers programmes and informally in discussions with their teachers. Unfortunately, information about such careers is not always readily available. In their article *Tapping young potential*, the Engineering and Technology Board team set out some of the issues, raise many questions and start to indicate a way forward.

In the feature, *Finding out about careers in science*, some sources of information – ASE Science Year CD-ROMs, the WISE campaign and the NOISE project – have been highlighted. Although a scientific career is not appropriate for all pupils, the profiles of the young scientists demonstrate very clearly that they 'have a life' outside their research which in itself is fascinating. Enthusing pupils is at the heart of teaching and these materials should help to do just that. If you are unable to make use of these resources as part of your science work, why not bring them to the attention of the careers department?

In promoting careers in science we should not forget that teaching science can be very satisfying. How we present teaching as a career may be a small, but significant, contribution to addressing the shortage of teachers. The article by James Williams touches on another element in the equation, that of supporting trainee teachers in school. He reminds us that, although demanding, mentoring potential new members of the profession has benefits for all parties.

I am sure that the issues raised by the articles on careers will receive different reactions, but they are unlikely to differ as much as the responses that have been evoked as a result of the thoughts expressed in February's *EiS*. Restrictions on space have prevented publication of all the views, but I would like to thank everyone who has responded via one medium or another. Jim Donnelly's article is yet another thought-provoking contribution to the debate. Is he right to suggest that teachers have lost faith in science education? Maybe it is time we started to be more positive and to celebrate the many good things that go on in classrooms across the country everyday. There are things we would all like to do to enhance and enrich the experience of our pupils, but we must not forget to promote the high quality teaching of science that already exists.

By the time you read this, the end of another busy school year will be in sight. I hope you have had a successful year and that you enjoy a good summer break.

Derek Bell

Dr Derek Bell is Chief Executive of ASE.

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As we go to press it has just been confirmed that (subject to parliamentary business) the Secretary of State for Education, The Right Honourable Charles Clarke MP, has agreed to deliver the inaugural ASE Keynote Lecture on 8th January 2004 at the ASE Annual Meeting which will be held at the University of Reading. Details of the Annual Meeting will be available in September.