

Notes & NEWS

Gordon Brown's Budget March 2006

When the Chancellor of the Exchequer rose to present his budget in March, few of us expected hear him make statements specifically about science education. Nearly every budget refers to 'education' and many highlight 'science', but it is without precedent for 'science education' to have such a high profile.

Behind the headlines there is a clear commitment by The Treasury, Department for Education and Skills, and Department for Trade and Industry to give science education a higher priority. The Chancellor's commitment is set out in more detail in the document *Science and Innovation Investment Framework 2004–2014: Next Steps* which can be found on The Treasury website (hm-treasury.gov.uk) or via the link from the ASE website.

Chapter 6 sets out a series of ambitions and targets which include increasing the number of students taking A levels in physics, chemistry and maths; developing and piloting a diploma to 'give science teachers without a physics and chemistry specialism the deep subject knowledge and pedagogy they need to teach these subject effectively'; from 2008 giving an entitlement for all pupils who achieve level 6 at key stage 3 to study three separate science GCSEs; and 'make science a priority in schools by including science in the School Accountability Framework'.

For those of you working in England, at least, this document will have implications. If you have any comments or suggestions please send them to derekbell@ase.org.uk, so we can raise them on your behalf at every opportunity.

Teacher Research Group Annual Conference

PALAVA, the Reading Science Teacher Researcher Group, will be holding its Annual Conference on Saturday 24th June from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the Institute of Education at the University of Reading. The group,

which is sponsored and supported by the ASE local region and the Royal Society of Chemistry local section, comprises university and school colleagues engaging with action research in science education.

The title of this year's conference is *There is Nothing So Practical as a Good Theory: Action Research in Science Education* and there will be a number of one-hour sessions, both informative and interactive, including the following:

- Using animations to explore learner thinking in chemistry;
- Project to Enhance Assessment of Recorded Learning in Science (PEARLS);
- Mapping Affective aspects of learning Project (MAP);
- Insight into understanding through animated thinking in chemistry; and
- Before the Black Box – what should learners record and who should be able to see it?

The conference is open to all ASE members, in particular secondary teachers, consultants and advisers, and teacher educators. There is no charge for attendance but there will be a nominal charge for lunch and refreshments. Speakers from the PALAVA group include both teachers and researchers. Please e-mail John Oversby at J.P.Oversby@reading.ac.uk for further details.

The Aventis Prizes for Science Books

The Royal Society's Aventis Prizes for Science Books Junior Prize was unveiled on 16th May (see Stop Press below), with one lucky author winning the prestigious title and following in the footsteps of Lord Robert Winston, the winner in 2005 for his first book for children, *What Makes Me, Me?* These awards differ from the majority of children's book awards, in that instead of asking a panel of adults to choose a winner, the children – for whom the books are written – decide!

Over 1,000 children in science and reading clubs across the country are invited to take part in the judging process and ultimately they decide which author walks off with the

£10,000 first prize. This part of the judging process is carried out by teaming up with Ecsite-uk, the network of science centres and museums.

The process begins by providing each junior panel with a set of the six short-listed books chosen by the Junior Prize Judges, chaired this year by award-winning writer and Children's Laureate 2001–2003, Anne Fine. The panels then read and discuss the books. The judging sheets encourage them to think about what exactly makes the book so enjoyable. Books are scored according to a number of criteria, for example how easy was it to read; did the language flow well and ultimately would you recommend this book to a friend? All this information is then sent to The Royal Society, which collates the scores and announces a clear winner.

The six books short-listed by the judging panel for the 2006 Prize are:

- *100 Science Experiments* – Georgina Andrews and Kate Knighton;
- *Think of a Number* – Johnny Ball;
- *It's True! Squids Suck* – Nicki Greenberg;
- *Blame My Brain* – Nicola Morgan;
- *The Global Garden* – Kate Petty and Jennie Maizels; and
- *Kingfisher Knowledge: Forensics* – Richard Platt.

To find out more about hosting a judging panel at your school or science club for the 2007 awards, visit www.aventisprizes.com or e-mail books@scizmic.net.

STOP PRESS

The winner of the 2006 Aventis Junior Science Prize is *The Global Garden*.

Newsfilm Online

In February 2007, the Joint Information Systems Committee will launch a new audiovisual resource for the higher and further education communities called Newsfilm Online. Some 3,000 hours of television news and cinema newsreels, taken from the collection of the ITN/Reuters archive, is to be made available online in

Changes in pay and management structures

I am writing in response to Martin Smietanko's letter regarding the introduction of Teaching and Learning Responsibilities at his school (*EiS*, April 2006), which I think may be misleading to the wider readership who may not be working in schools. The letter gives the impression that the management system put in place at his school is a nationally imposed system. Quite emphatically, this is not the case. Each school should have gone through a consultation period with its staff during the autumn term in 2005, to produce a management system that would be fair and transparent to all those members of staff in that school and based on responsibilities directly relevant to teaching and learning.

In every school, this was an opportunity to create a management system that would best serve the needs of the pupils. In my school, not dissimilar in size and the same in terms of existing structure, i.e. three individual heads of science, this was an opportunity to raise the profile of

science and to reward appropriately. My three heads of science are now paid more than they were and so could be viewed as 'winners' in the new structure.

As a headteacher (former head of biology and head of science), I saw the major problem of this initiative as causing turbulence within the staff room, and taking an immense amount of my time which prevented me targeting strategic initiatives to help raise pupil achievement. Though I have sympathy with Mr Smietanko's individual position, it is important to realise that headteachers, pressured by Government, had a very short period of time to create a structure which would be to everybody's liking and within budget, particularly as this was not meant to be an assimilation exercise. Different schools took different approaches and though there may be some schools where 'scientists' have lost out, equally there are schools where 'scientists' have benefited in financial terms.

Obviously I cannot comment on the consultation process that was undertaken

at Mr Smietanko's school nor the priorities that his school had when drawing up their criteria for awarding allowances. This, though, is the nub of the problem that will lead to pay inequalities between schools, as different schools decided to organise their science teaching in different ways with varying structures and priorities. As a result, it will be possible to find very different salaries for doing what is essentially the same job in schools of similar size. Mr Smietanko's comment regarding colleagues losing salary '*despite all the changes in the pipeline*' is well made and I would hope that his school is the exception rather than the rule regarding the appropriate reward of science staff.

Ian Carter

Headmaster,

Poole Grammar School

We welcome your letters for *EiS*. Please write to the Editor at ASE Headquarters or e-mail derekbell@ase.org.uk.

◀ high-quality downloadable formats for teaching, learning and research.

The resource will span a time period from 1910 to the present day and cover a wide range of subject matter, including science and technology. It will provide an unprecedented opportunity to view how issues in science have been communicated to the public through television news. It will be supported by an extensive database, with clear and comprehensible searching. 450,000 pages of newscast bulletin scripts are also being digitised and will be available as part of Newsfilm Online.

Newsfilm Online will open up a new resource for teaching and learning and will create new research opportunities across many disciplines. A 'demonstrator' website is currently available at www.bufovc.ac.uk/newsfilmonline, making some 50 news clips (approximately one hour of material) freely available for downloading to all users. These clips are arranged by

theme and decade, and comments on any of these are welcome by providing feedback via the website.

Newsfilm Online is a collaborative venture between the British Universities Film and Video Council (BUFOVC) and ITN, and funded by the Joint Information Systems Committee.

Exciting Writing

The ASE journal *School Science Review* began as a forum for science teachers to exchange ideas. Are you interested in getting your ideas for teaching science into print? Do you have ideas, for effective practical work, reliable demonstrations, enjoyable classroom activities, techniques to promote understanding or effective learning? To help you develop your ideas and get them into print, the *SSR* editorial team is planning a writing workshop, to cover

all levels in the age range 5–19. The intention is to have the workshop at the National Science Learning Centre, which is on the campus of the University of York, some time in the latter part of the autumn term. Oxford University Press has kindly agreed to sponsor the event. This sponsorship will cover the cost of running the course, and ASE will provide assistance with travel. For those who wish, this experience could evolve into opportunities to write for other publications such as textbooks.

To register an interest, please write to *SSR* Editor, Geoff Auty, at ASE, College Lane, Hatfield, AL10 9AA. Alternatively, you can e-mail ssreditor@ase.org.uk or jeanettebowers@ase.org.uk. Full details will be sent as soon as they are available to those who express interest.

The bottom line is that you get credit for your ideas being more widely recognised than in your own school, and it is a different way of demonstrating CPD.