

Association President 2005



Sir Michael Tomlinson

During my career there have been a number of unexpected events and being asked by Derek Bell if I would be the ASE President for 2005 was just that, unexpected. I readily accepted as 2005 marks my 40th year as a member of ASE, which I joined in 1965 as a PGCE student in Nottingham.

I had always wanted to be a teacher, largely as a result of my grandmother's influence, and it was not until late in my secondary education that science finally caught my imagination. This, not surprisingly, was fired by two teachers, one in the sixth form whose passion for chemistry inspired me to follow his lead. Sixth form was followed by university and then the PGCE.

My first teaching post in Nottingham lasted for four years, serving under a wise head of department who not only passed on many tips about teaching but also knew his subject backwards. We have remained in contact to this day. I also had the chance to become involved in extra-curricular activities: rugby, cross-country running and foreign trips. The importance of such opportunities for students remains very high to me

when considering the elements of a 'good' education. It was then to Ashby-de-la-Zouch as head of chemistry and a period in my life of enormous personal and professional development. This was the era of Nuffield, when school science was re-defined and innovation and risk taking were considered acceptable. For my part, I sought to link my science teaching with its applications in industry, at a time when this was not considered necessary. Project weeks, work with BP, ICI, Unilever and others offered me and my students tremendous learning opportunities. A spell on secondment to ICI in 1977 heralded the end of my teaching career, as in 1978 I joined H.M. Inspectorate.

This was at the time of the National Secondary Survey and the beginning of a real interest in linking teaching with industry, following the then Prime Minister's Ruskin College speech. I had 25 wonderful years at HMI, a body of people with enormous experience and skill and one which to this day is respected. I held various posts, all different and all challenging, but in 1992 we

all faced change as OFSTED was created. I transferred to OFSTED and prepared to meet yet more challenges. It was not an easy time for HMI, but like true professionals they adapted and worked hard to implement government policy. In 2000, I was ready to take early retirement when the then HMCI resigned. I was asked if I would put retirement on hold and become HMCI. I readily agreed.

In this role I sought to re-establish, among the profession, the credibility of OFSTED and give back to HMI some further degree of self-belief. It is for others to judge whether or not I achieved either of these aims. Retirement finally caught up with me in 2002, or so I believed.

I had agreed to Chair the Board of The Learning Trust, the not-for-profit trust set up to manage the education services in Hackney and, with a small number of other commitments, I looked forward to a return to science activities. However, a telephone call in the autumn in 2002 changed all of that. The call asked me to lead the inquiry into the grading controversy surrounding the first year of the Curriculum 2000 examinations. I could not resist, and I had no sooner finished that job than I

agreed to Chair the Working

Group on 14-19 reform.

I had done the pre-retirement course, but failed to put into practice what I had promised myself and my wife.

I remain passionate about education generally. The fact that it has given me such opportunities in life drives me to want all young people to have the same chances. As to science, I am concerned that the 'wow' factor for students has diminished. Too many 11 to 13 year-olds I talk to say science is boring, too many choose not to pursue the subject post-16 and at HE. Science is vital to our future as a nation, and science teaching in schools is the bedrock. We need to find out how to put more 'wow' back into science teaching, particularly at the secondary level. We have the teachers with enthusiasm, we need to provide them with a framework which encourages innovation, provides adequate physical facilities and resources, and sees assessment and examinations as supportive of teaching and learning and not dictating it. My aim for the year as President is to try, with all members of ASE, to set out for policy makers and others just what is needed if more 'wow' is to be put back into science teaching.