From lab bench to backbench

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University of Birmingham cancer scientist Dr Joanna Parish will be swapping her lab coat for legislation, when she visits MP Gisela Stuart at the House of Commons for a "Week in Westminster". Starting on Monday 29 October, it as part of a unique 'pairing' scheme run by the Royal Society – the UK's national academy of science.

During her visit, Dr Parish, of the School of Cancer Sciences will shadow the MP and learn about her work, as well as attending a Commons Science and Technology Committee meeting and Prime Minister's Question Time plus meeting Professor Sir John Beddington, the Government's Chief Scientific Advisor. The visit will provide Dr Parish with a behind-the-scenes insight into how science policy is formed as well as an understanding of the working life of an MP.

Dr Parish commented: "I *am very interested in how policies regarding human health and disease are adopted within parliament and how this shapes the way academic research is conducted within the UK. The Royal Society MP pairing scheme will provide a unique opportunity for me to learn more about how decisions are made within parliament and how these are implemented to shape the way scientists conduct research."*

Gisela Stuart MP said: '*I'm keen to support schemes which bring together researchers and policy makers. If politicians don't understand the needs of universities and those who work in them, they won't be able to make good decisions. New technologies will provide the jobs we need.'*

The Royal Society's MP-Scientist pairing scheme aims to build bridges between parliamentarians and some of the best scientists in the UK. It is an opportunity for MPs to become better informed about science issues and for scientists to understand how they can influence science policy. Over 200 pairs of scientists and MPs have taken part in the scheme since it was launched in 2001.

Sir Paul Nurse, President of the Royal Society and Nobel-prize winning alumnus of the University of Birmingham, said: *'We live in a world facing increasing challenges that can only be addressed with a clear understanding of science. From climate change to influenza outbreaks, GM food to nuclear power, our MPs have to make decisions about complex issues that will affect the lives of all those in the UK and, in many cases, more widely throughout the world. This means that MPs and scientists have a responsibility to engage with each other to get the best possible scientific advice into public policy making.*

'We set up the Royal Society's MP Scientist pairing scheme in 2001 to provide the opportunity for MPs and scientists to build long-term relationships with each other and have now organised over two hundred pairings.

'I know many parliamentarians and scientists who have gained from the scheme, and the shaping of public policy can only improve over time as these relationships continue to grow."

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. **The Royal Society** is the UK's national academy of science. Founded in 1660, the Society has three roles, as a provider of independent scientific advice, as a learned Society, and as a funding agency. Our expertise is embodied in the Fellowship, which is made up of the finest scientists from the UK and beyond. Our goals are to:

- Invest in future scientific leaders and in innovation
- Influence policymaking with the best scientific advice
- Invigorate science and mathematics education
- Increase access to the best science internationally
- Inspire an interest in the joy, wonder and excitement of scientific discovery

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