

YOUNG SCIENTISTS QUIZ KEY POLITICAL FIGURES AT VOF 2023

13 March 2023

Young and early career scientists were given the chance to voice their questions about the future of science to MPs, ministers and Defra's Chief Scientific Advisor.



From left to right: Dr Faten Hussein, Dr Claire Kanja, and Susie Rabin

As part of the Society's annual Voice of the Future event, committee seats in the Boothroyd Room were occupied by a panel of young researchers who were invited to quiz a variety of key political figures sitting in the witness seats about science policy issues.

The proceedings were launched by Dr Claire Kanja, committee specialist in the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee, and the event was live streamed on the parliament website.

The first witnesses to give evidence were MPs from the Science and Technology Select Committee: Stephen Metcalfe, Carol Monaghan, and Katherine Fletcher.

The panel were asked questions on nuclear energy, scientists moving into policy, COVID-19, amongst others.

In particular, the Council for Mathematical Sciences highlighted 89% of math professors in the UK are men, compared to 11% of women. They asked what the panel think is the cause of such gender disparities in mathematics, and what should be done to address this?



Panel from left to right: Katherine Fletcher MP, Stephen Metcalfe MP, and Carol Monaghan MP

Carol Monaghan recounted a head teacher of a prominent school commenting "girls can't do hard maths" at a Select Committee hearing. As a former physics teacher, she argued that to get girls doing physics and maths, it is vital to plant the seeds, and find the talent, which in turn will appeal to both students and parents.



Professor Gideon Henderson, Defra Chief Scientist

YOUNG RESEARCHERS ACTING AS COMMITTEE MEMBERS.

Next Professor Gideon Henderson, Defra Chief Scientist, was questioned by the panel members. He was asked by Ciara O'Brien from the Association of Applied Biologists how will parliament ensure that the public is well-informed about the benefits of genetic technologies. He responded that in terms of genetically modified (GM) crops, many consumers are looking for affordable and healthy food that is of a high quality. For consumers who are concerned about GM, Government need to work out a way to tackle misinformation by giving citizens an avenue to access the information on these technologies.

Following Professor Henderson, Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP, chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, was the next witness. He discussed sewage issues and promoting geothermal energy. On the subject of sewage, Katie Powell from the British Ecological Society asked what is the Government doing to prevent sewage being released and how will they help restore the health of our aquatic ecosystems for nature and people? He commented that the main sewers through London were supposed to last 100 years, taking us to the 1960s. Since then most of our systems were reaching capacity, and although we have developed above ground to cope, we haven't developed capacity underground.

He noted that leaving the EU forced Government to create new environmental regulations, and water quality was one of the issues that came up. Technologies are being developed that will notify us of breaches, and notify the public.

Voice of the Future is an annual event organised by the Royal Society of Biology, which invites young scientists to represent scientific organisations including: Applied Microbiology International, the Association of Applied Biologists, the Biochemical Society, the British Ecological Society, the British Pharmacological Society, the British Society for Immunology, the Council for the Mathematical Sciences, the Geological Society, the Institute of Physics, the Institution of Chemical Engineers, the Nutrition Society, the Royal Astronomical Society, the Royal Society of Biology, the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Society of Chemical Industry, The Open University, and The Physiological Society.

A full video of the Voice of the Future hearing is available on the [Parliamentlive.tv](https://www.parliamentlive.tv) website



Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP, chair of the Environmental Audit Committee



Young researchers acting as committee members



Young Researchers

