

The All Party Parliamentary Engineering and Information Technology Group

'Careers in space'

Report of the discussion over lunch held on 29 March 2009

Guest Speaker

Rt Hon Lord Drayson, Ph D, Minister of State for Science and Innovation

Chairman

Professor the Lord Broers

Introduction

Lord Broers and John Long (IHEEM) Lord Broers reminded the meeting that the main aim of the Group was to enable young engineers to meet legislators. Once again the meeting was oversubscribed and he thanked Jennifer Bryant-Pearson for the indefatigable way in which she had organized the event.

The UK was outflanked by all its European competitors in terms of spending on space research but in fact was number 1 in terms of quality and achievement. In 2008 approx £7 bn had been invested in the UK principally in areas of robotics, communications, environment and health.

Dr David Parker director of the British National Space Centre was present.

APPEITG - Careers in Space. In introducing the guest speaker, Lord Drayson, Minister for science and innovation, Lord Broers reminded the meeting that Lord Drayson had a PhD in robotics and was the founder of Powderject which had achieved phenomenal success. He had been asked to speak on the topic of careers in space.

Questions and Answers

Among the issues discussed were the following:

Entrepreneurism: The UK has a generation of very high quality engineering entrepreneurs coming through and the Government should support them during the current downturn. The UK needed more engineers especially women engineers. W.I.S.E was doing a lot to encourage this. There needed to be a more imaginative approach. The first UK astronaut was British.

It was a fact that many British engineers had had to change their nationality to US in order to pursue their research and further their careers. So a review was under way to see how more could be done.

Education: part of the problem of a lack of engineers might lie in current education philosophy which failed to see the wider picture. Although a lot of money was being spent on promoting engineering there were too many initiatives and these needed to be pruned. Lord Drayson cited the Big Bang fair as an example of how children could be inspired.

Apprenticeships: The Government was committed to maintain expenditure at £2.9 mill for science and engineering apprenticeship support by 2017.

British innovation: we were very good at altering the economics of space by innovative design and engineering e.g. small satellite technology-best in the world.

Space tourism: enormous potential for UK entrepreneurs.