

RISW Newsletter. Winter 2011. B.M.

Extra (final) Lecture Review.

Wednesday, 30th November 2011

The President's Invitation Lecture:

A FORWARD VIEW OF WELSH SCIENCE

By Professor John Harries, Chief Scientific Adviser for Wales

This lecture was held in the Wallace Lecture Theatre at Swansea University, and we are grateful to the Vice Chancellor, Professor Richard Davies, for making this venue available. Our speaker, Professor John Harries had been educated at Bridgend Grammar School and had been Professor of Computer Science at Swansea University. He is now Professor of Earth Observation at Imperial College, London, currently on secondment to the Welsh Assembly Government. He has recently been awarded the prestigious Distinguished Public Service Medal by NASA. As Chief Scientific Adviser for Wales he has wide-ranging responsibilities, including the production for the approval of the Assembly Government of an updated Strategic Agenda document, to be published shortly under the title *Science in Wales*. His brief covers Science, Technology and Engineering - assessing what problems may exist and how they might be solved. In particular he has to consider how research, much of it good already, can be improved in accordance with the Assembly Government's aim to use science to enhance the economy and welfare of the people of Wales. To this end a co-ordinate structure linking groups and bodies actively engaged in science has been prepared, and detailed assessments of ways of improving research are in hand. Aspects within his overall remit include bovine TB; GM crops; solar cells; climate change; and tidal power. Computer science and social sciences are also within his responsibilities. In the eighteen months since his appointment, Professor Harries has established close contact with other Chief Scientific Advisers in Britain and has visited many University scientific research projects. He has found much in Wales that is already excellent. However, he stressed the importance of increasing Wales' share of funding for research. We lagged behind in this at present, and he pointed out that for every pound that was raised competitively for funding scientific research in England, Wales raised just 60p, and yet Scotland was able to gather £2. This disparity had to be addressed, and we also needed to raise our profile in attracting new science-based activities here. He quoted as an example the move of the Meteorological Office from Bracknell to Exeter, bringing many scientific and support jobs to the West Country, but apparently Wales did not figure as a possible location, despite some potentially strong possibilities. Professor Harris stressed that Wales needed to recognise its existing excellence in scientific research, to build upon that, and to be able to seek and develop new areas for expansion. Above all the aim should be the creation of more opportunities of quality work for its people.

Bernard Morris