

17 June 2010

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Dear Mr Gove,

As scientists and educators, we are writing to urge you to protect and promote science in the school curriculum, with the specific inclusion of the teaching of evolution in the primary curriculum. For the first time, the teaching of evolution had been included in the revised primary curriculum in the previous government's Children, Schools and Families Bill. We regret that those reforms were dropped from the legislation in the final days of the last parliament. We are deeply concerned to ensure that evolution and science form a core part of any revised primary curriculum.

Science is not only key to understanding the world around us, but it is also vital for democratic citizenship. Without an understanding of key scientific concepts people cannot properly engage with public debates around the scientific and technological issues which will directly affect their lives. The teaching of science in schools also opens up the wonder of the natural world to inquiring minds, and at the same time equips young people with the tools for explaining natural phenomena and an understanding and practical application of scientific methods.

In particular, the evolution is the most important idea underlying biological science. It is a key concept that children should be introduced to at an early stage so as to ensure a firm scientific understanding when they study it in more depth later on. An understanding of evolution is central to understanding all aspects of biology, from human behaviour to the genetic basis of disease, to ecological relationships and how the environment affects the development and diversity of life on earth. As such it should be a central tenet, not, as is currently too often the case, marginal to the study of school biology.

Whatever curriculum reforms are made, we urge that there is teaching of evolution for all school age children, and especially in the primary curriculum.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Sir Tom Blundell FRS FMedSci is Sir William Dunn Professor of Biochemistry and head of the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Cambridge.

Paul Braterman is Professor Emeritus, University of North Texas and Honorary Senior Research Fellow in Chemistry, University of Glasgow.

Professor Richard Dawkins FRS is the former Professor for Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University and a prominent broadcaster on science.

Professor Robin Dunbar FBA is Professor of Evolutionary Anthropology at the University of Oxford.

Professor Sir Anthony Epstein, CBE, FRS, hon FRSE, FRCP is former Professor of Pathology, and Head of Department at the University of Bristol.

Professor R. John Ellis FRS is professor at the department of Biological Sciences, University of Warwick, Gairdner International Award Winner 2006, Cell Stress Society International Medal winner 2008.

Dr Dylan Evans, Lecturer in Behavioural Science in the School of Medicine at University College Cork

Sir James Gowans CBE FRCP FRS was Henry Dale Research Professor of the Royal Society at the University of Oxford

Professor Robert A Hinde CBE FRS FBE is Emeritus Royal Society Research Professor of Zoology at the University of Cambridge and former master of St. John's College, Cambridge.

Sir Tim Hunt FRS is a Nobel laureate in Physiology or Medicine.

Dr Julian Huppert, Member of Parliament.

Professor Hugh Huxley FRS MBE won the Royal Medal in 1977 and the Copley Medal in 1997. He was Professor of biology at Brandeis University.

Professor Steve Jones is professor of genetics and head of the biology department at University College London.

Professor Sir Hans Kornberg FRS. Professor of Biology at Boston University and former Master of Christ's College, Cambridge.

Professor Sir Harold Kroto FRS was joint 1996 Nobel laureates in Chemistry.

Professor John Lee FRCPATH is consultant histopathologist at Rotherham General Hospital and clinical professor of pathology at Hull York Medical School. He has also broadcast and science and medicine.

Sir Paul Nurse FRS is a Nobel laureate in Physiology or Medicine and President of Rockefeller University.

Revd Professor Michael Reiss FIBiol, FRSA is Assistant Director and Professor of Science Education at the Institute of Education, University of London.

Sir David Smith FRS FRSE is former Principal of Edinburgh University (1987-1994), former President of Wolfson College, Oxford (1994-2000) and was awarded the Gold Medal for Botany of the Linnean Society in 1989.

Professor Sir Kenneth Stuart FRCP is a former adviser to Commonwealth Secretariat, London; Professor and Head of Department of Medicine, University of the West Indies, Jamaica; consultant, University Hospital, Jamaica; and consultant advisor to the Wellcome Trust.

Sir Fraser Stoddart FRS, FRSE is professor of Chemistry, Northwestern University

Sir John Sulston FRS is Chair, Institute for Science, Ethics and Innovation (iSEI) at the University of Manchester

James Williams FIBio CSciTeach is Lecturer in Science Education at the University of Sussex.

Professor Raymond Tallis FMedSci is Emeritus Professor of Geriatric Medicine at the University of Manchester.

Professor Sir David Weatherall FRS, current Chancellor of Keele University. Former Professor of Haematology, former Nuffield Professor of Clinical Medicine at the University of Oxford and former Regius Professor of Medicine.

Professor Lewis Wolpert CBE FRS is Emeritus Professor of Biology as applied to Medicine, University College London.