

**Kyoto afternoon session: “The role of universities in the 21st Century”
8 October 2007**

Sir Richard Sykes’ speaking points to open the session

Warm welcome to everyone and especially our speakers today (etc) – to this session on “The role of universities in the 21st Century”

Three questions we have to tackle today:

- In the Knowledge Economy what are the new challenges faced by Universities?
- What challenges particularly in the areas of cross-disciplinary research and Technology Transfer?
- Should Universities be working in closer collaboration with Industry?

Our eminent panellists today will deliver their verdict, but in opening the session I’d just like to make **four** observations:

- **First:** Most universities want to play their part in modern society and do not wish to be isolated. We recognise we are critical to the Knowledge Economy in a range of ways:
 - Essential for wealth generation
 - Essential to addressing global challenges
 - Essential for tackling social inequalities and improving quality of life
 - Essential for fostering better understanding between cultures
- That is why alongside traditional scholarship and teaching, we have this drive to translate scientific research into goods, services or therapies.
- At Imperial that was part of our founding mission so you would expect to see it – but today at almost all universities you will find Knowledge Transfer offices, patenting and exploitation companies in-house or interacting very closely.
- **Second:** To have a Knowledge Economy worth speaking about we have to encourage and energise the debate in secondary schooling; we should not do their work for them, but we should raise the sights and help children aspire.
- Therefore big agenda in the UK = “Outreach” or “Widening Participation”

- Means working in and with schools – just one example: between July and Sept – the long summer vacation in the UK – at my own institution, we run **70** different summer schools, for over **3,500** students aged 11-16.
- Workshops cover alternative energy, robotics, the science of crime scene investigations, and the relationship between chemistry and art.
- It's a big commitment by our staff and we have to partner with a big range of organisations to achieve it – we couldn't do it alone.
- **Third:** This raising of aspiration for the new wave of young pioneers leads on to my 3rd observation: the problems they are going to have to face are truly global and are very complex – e.g. climate change, depleting natural resources, improving public health and wealth.
- To crack them requires teams working across disciplines – scientists and engineers especially.
- To crack them requires brain power on an international stage.
- This brain power is scarce, but is richest in universities
- **Fourth:** The signature of an international organisation, one that aspires to be global in outlook, is that it draws in and recruits its members internationally.
- As well as intellectual benefits these lead to social and cultural benefits.
- Almost half of our students originate outside of the UK as do the majority of our new academic and research staff – we also send our students out into the world – courses, collaborations and expeditions.

Now I very much look forward to debating this issue which is critical; I think the role of universities in the 21st century is a leadership role and that means we have a great responsibility on us.

So, I'm delighted to welcome our first speaker, _____

R B Sykes
5 October 2007