

New shadowing experience in the House of Lords: Professor Seif Shaheen and Professor Lord Winston

In 2013 the Royal Society Pairing Scheme was expanded to include Members of the House of Lords. This will allow scientists to learn about the work of the second chamber of the UK Parliament and to explore the working life of its Members by attending debates on public policy or special issues, committee meetings or 'oral questions'. The House of Lords is independent from the House of Commons but both Houses share responsibility for scrutinising the government's actions, considering bills and making laws. As Members of the Lords come from different backgrounds and professions - some of them are scientists themselves – shadowing a peer can be a valuable experience for scientists with a strong interest in policy-making.

As part of the new expansion, Professor Seif Shaheen, Professor of Respiratory Epidemiology at Barts and The London School of Medicine at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) was paired with Professor Lord Winston. Seif's research is focused on trying to discover the causes of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease in order to devise strategies for preventing these conditions. He applied for the scheme to find out more about how scientific evidence can be translated into science policy, how political decisions are made on scientific and public health issues, what the barriers are to implementing policy, and how scientists can work with politicians to overcome these obstacles. Lord Winston is a distinguished medical scientist, television presenter and a Member of the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee.



Lord Winston and his pair Professor Seif Shaheen at their first meeting in Portcullis House

Seif spent two days during the week in Westminster shadowing Lord Winston and attending different meetings and debates in the House of Lords. He commented: "I learned such a lot during my week in Westminster and enjoyed my time shadowing Lord Winston – it was a privilege to be paired with him. Highlights included attending the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee meetings – I now feel better prepared should I ever be called to give oral evidence to such a committee".

As a former student at the London Hospital Medical College, Lord Winston was particularly happy to come back to QMUL for the reciprocal visit. He said: "I look forward to returning to my old medical school and learning more about the



Reciprocal visit: Lord Winston answers schoolchildren's questions in the Centre of Cell

research that Professor Shaheen and his team are undertaking". During his visit at Seif's place of work, he and his colleagues gave him an overview of the respiratory research they are currently engaged in. This was followed by a visit to the Centre of the Cell, a science and health education centre and outreach project, and a showcase example of Public Engagement, where Lord Winston, who is also a Professor of Science and Society at Imperial College interacted with schoolchildren as they learned about cells and the cell based medical research going on at QMUL.

Seif, summing up: "Would I recommend the Pairing Scheme to colleagues? Absolutely – the 'ayes' have it!"

