

## It is time science centres gained official support

*From Ms Linda Conlon.*

Sir, The views of Sir Richard Sykes following those of Richard Lambert, the new director-general of the CBI (report, August 14), on the failure of our education system to enthuse young people about the merits of taking up the challenge of science, and its consequences, has occasioned a lively exchange between other correspondents to this page.

At issue is whether our current system has an inbuilt bias towards encouraging pupils in the direction of arts, humanities and business studies rather than science subjects and, if so, what can be done to counteract it.

Those of us who run science centres - of which there are now many in major UK cities - recognise that the key to developing curiosity about science in young people lies in showing how discoveries in nature and science can affect their lives directly through our development of technologies that they are familiar with and use.

In science centres we aim to provide hands-on opportunities to experience this. Schools use us extensively because they know that national curriculum syllabuses on their own cannot provide it.

Without this curiosity students rapidly opt to take on what to them are more directly relevant and interesting subjects, be they languages, sports or media studies.

Yet the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Trade and Industry seem largely blind to this. They fund out-of-school activities in music-making, theatre, dance and other artistic endeavours, and sponsor arts councils to increase young people's access to these activities.

But they take no interest, financial or otherwise, in science outreach activities that science centres and others provide, from our own income-raising activities or with the help of other charitable bodies.

If it the government believes that science matters as much as the arts, and wants others to be convinced of this, it is time for government departments to offer support to organisations such as science centres that are making a positive effort to maintain the interest of young people in contemporary science.

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