

Parliamentary Friends of Science

Victoria Wansink^A

Hosted by Science and Technology Australia (STA), the Parliamentary Friends of Science breakfast, held on 30 November 2023 at Parliament House, Canberra, was attended by a diverse mix of parliamentarians, STEM-sector leads and experts, and senior public servants. Representing The Australian Society for Microbiology (ASM), Dr Victoria Wansink (Director Microbiology, ACT Health) listened to the four-person panel share their thoughts on the challenges faced by the STEM workforce in Australia. The aspects that the panel focused on, included preparing the next generation of scientist for careers that may not even exist currently, the importance of diversity within the workforce (including the emphasis on varieties of work-life experiences, career pathways, (cross) training, etc.) and flexibility in multi-faceted, multi-directional careers (a ‘London Underground’ of opportunities).

The many conversations during the networking opportunities, provided before and after the official proceedings, highlighted the variety of attendees, but all displayed a genuine interest and curiosity in STEM and linkages with government processes and policy developments. The ability for the STEM professionals in the room to engage with parliamentarians, policy makers and other senior public servants is crucial for the demystifying of the STEM fields, encouraging critical thinking and curiosity, as well as ensuring that messaging relating to STEM being present everywhere it is needed.

I had many conversations about the field of microbiology (mainly kickstarted by the dress I managed to find for the event, see Fig. 1), as well as more general science, communication and research-funding topics. The warm welcome I received from STA organisers was a credit to Peter Traynor’s previous networking with the organisation and STA was pleased that



Fig. 1. The dress that kickstarted conversations about microbiology.

The ASM was again represented for the event. The time (1 h) flew by and, before we knew it, it was time to be escorted back to the public entrance and start a regular workday.

Personally, I felt very honoured to represent The ASM and its members at this event. It was an inspiring look inside Parliament House and at how small, short gatherings can spark insightful and respectful conversation to educate and inspire. It was a unique (yet somewhat daunting) way to start the day, but, should the opportunity arise again, I would definitely enjoy attending (and may even stop to look more closely at some of the beautiful surroundings of Parliament House)!

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