

Public still suspicious of scientists

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‘Our arrogance cost us the GM debate’ is the message to academics and business delegates at the White Rose Bioscience Forum today (Tuesday 31 October).

Director of the University of Sheffield Polymer Centre and ICI Professor of Physical Chemistry, Tony Ryan, will tell delegates that the scientific and business community should have responded better to public concerns over genetic engineering, instead of ‘patting them on the head and saying there was nothing to worry about’.

“The relationship between science, engineering and society is a difficult one, and the public are often suspicious,” says Professor Ryan. “This was the case with GM, but our mismanagement meant we lost the debate to activists only interested in single issue politics and now we’re paying the price. So many advances that could have brought great benefit to society have been stopped in their tracks.”

As well as criticising scientists and business people for past mistakes, Professor Ryan will also be highlighting the important contribution bioscience can – and must - make in the future.

“Our lives are enriched every day by the great discoveries made by scientists,” he says. “But it will all matter for nothing unless we solve the most important issue facing the world – the energy crisis. And bioscience holds the key.”

“We need to stop burning buried sunshine and instead learn, from

biology, how to capture energy directly from the sun and convert it into energy we can use.”

But bioscience can't help to save the world without communicating with it, so Professor Ryan will also be calling on the science and business community to learn from past mistakes and relate better with the public.

“We need to engage in dialogue and really listen when people say they aren't happy. There are going to be some tough issues ahead and we need to be taking part in the debates and getting our point across in the right way,” he says.

Professor Ryan – who was recently awarded an OBE for ‘Services to Science’ – is the after-dinner speaker at the Yorkshire Bioscience Forum.

Source: White Rose University

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