

RSE names Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell President

✖ The outstanding astrophysicist and prominent science communicator Professor Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell DBE, FRS, FRSE is the new President-elect of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE). The election follows a ballot of all RSE Fellows which saw an overwhelming response in favour of her nomination. She will succeed the current President, Sir John Arbuthnott MRIA, PRSE, in October.

Professor Dame Jocelyn is best known for discovering pulsars, one of the most significant scientific achievements of the twentieth century. These rapidly spinning neutron stars are formed in supernova explosions, the phenomena which make life in the universe possible. At the time Dame Jocelyn was a PhD student in radio astronomy at the University of Cambridge. Her supervisor Antony Hewish subsequently went on to win the 1974 Nobel Prize for Physics in recognition of the discovery, sharing it with the head of the group, Martin Ryle. She has been an influential campaigner in efforts to raise the number and profile of women in professional and academic science posts. In 2013 Dame Jocelyn was named in the BBC Radio 4 Woman's Hour 'Power List' of the 100 most influential women in the UK. In 2012 she chaired the group that produced the RSE's highly-regarded Tapping All Our Talents report on a Scottish strategy for women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Dame Jocelyn will begin her three year tenure as RSE President in October 2014. She takes over from Sir John whose period in office has, amongst several achievements, seen the delivery of the landmark Enlightening the Constitutional Debate series of events and the development of research links with China

including the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the RSE and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Commenting on the election, Sir John said, 'I am delighted to welcome Dame Jocelyn as my successor. Her scientific standing, her public profile and her great breadth of experience will greatly benefit the Royal Society of Edinburgh.'

Born in Northern Ireland, Dame Jocelyn graduated in Natural Philosophy from the University of Glasgow in 1965 then gained her PhD from Cambridge in 1969. From 1982 – 1991, she worked at the Royal Observatory, Edinburgh. She was then appointed Professor of Physics at the Open University and later became Dean of Science at the University of Bath (2001 – 04). In 2004 she became a Fellow of the RSE.

Dame Jocelyn was President of the Royal Astronomical Society from 2002 – 2004, and President of the Institute of Physics from 2008 – 2011. She is currently Visiting Professor of Astrophysics at the University of Oxford with research interests in neutron stars, micro quasars and gamma ray bursts. She has more than 20 Honorary Degrees, including from Harvard and five Scottish Universities. She received a DBE for services to astronomy in 2007.

Dame Jocelyn said, 'I look forward to serving the Royal Society of Edinburgh as its President from October this year. This will be an important time for Scotland as it finds its way forward following the referendum.'