

The President's International Fellowship Initiative (PIFI): CAS Rolls Out the Red Carpet



At the invitation of Prince Andrew, the Duke of York, CAS held a special reception at Buckingham Palace in February to promote its overseas recruitment packages, aiming at luring more British scientists to work in China.

By XIN Ling (Staff Reporter)

“It is very stimulating to see the interest in China to promote good science, and the funding made available to achieve this. The scheme offers excellent opportunities for PhD students, postdocs and permanent staff members,” said Prof. Carlos Nunez, a physicist from Swansea University who was invited to meet with Prince Andrew, the Duke of York and CAS President BAI Chunli on February 27, 2017 in Buckingham Palace.

The “scheme” Prof. Nunez was talking about is called the President’s International Fellowship Initiative, or PIFI, which was introduced at the meeting to more than 100 renowned researchers and senior executives from Great Britain’s Royal Society, research institutes, colleges and companies. First launched in 2013 as a package of fellowships to support international scientists and postgraduate students “to work and study at CAS institutions, and to strengthen their scientific collaboration with CAS researchers”, PIFI has so far provided 2,800 scientists the chance to work in China in one of four categories: distinguished scientists, visiting scientists, postdoctoral researchers, or international PhD students. Among them, 205 are from the UK, including Sir Andre Geim, a Nobel Prize laureate in Physics who used PIFI to make lecture trips and conduct cooperative research at CAS institutes. In 2017, 22 British scientists are expected to work in China through the fellowship.

“I am reminded of the Chinese who went West for advanced learning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, including those coming to England for research and study,” BAI said. “Now it is time for international scientists to go to China for scientific opportunities, supported by Chinese programs.”

“With this effort that the Duke of York and I are doing today, we hope to bring a lot of UK scientific talent to China to work, to explore scientific unknowns, and to address common challenges with our scientists”, he said.

Prince Andrew told the audience that “if the UK is going to continue to be at the forefront of science, technology and engineering, we will have to work with many different organizations or countries where we can get access to the best science.” According to him, besides Britain, “there are other countries in which equally good science goes on, and China is one of them.”

It was also announced at the event that, with Prince Andrew’s support, the initiative would be renamed in the UK as “the Duke of York – CAS President’s International Fellowship Initiative”.

Prof. Gert Aarts, another physicist from Swansea University, has visited China several times in the past years. “It is a very diverse country, which is worth exploring. Scientists are very eager to make connections and students are motivated to learn more about the UK,” he said. “I can recommend researchers to visit China, and I hope these funding opportunities will be successful.”

Also addressing the event was Prof. John Speakman, an expert in energy balance from the CAS Institute of Genetics and Developmental Biology. In 2011, Prof. Speakman moved from the University of Aberdeen to Beijing as a Thousand Talents Professor under the PIFI framework, and has been living in China with his family since then. He is a winner of the 2015 CAS Award for International Scientific Cooperation, which inspired a feature article in *BCAS* last year (From Scotland to China: Understanding Energy Balance for Three Decades and On, http://english.cas.cn/bcas/2016_2/201607/P020160722472269899360.pdf). In this issue of *BCAS*, we will have the honor to share with you Prof. Speakman’s talk at the Buckingham Palace, on his experiences of living in China and why he thinks more Britons should come and explore this great country.