

Partners in Innovation Conference

AIMING TO CATALYSE SUCCESSFUL COMMERCIAL PRODUCTS

On Thursday 18th July, 1991, some two hundred leading academics, industrialists, senior civil servants and the government minister with responsibility for higher education and science attended a conference hosted by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales at his home, Highgrove House, in Gloucestershire. Organised under the auspices of The Prince of Wales Award for Innovation, and jointly sponsored by Johnson Matthey and McKinsey and Company, the purpose of the conference, entitled "Partners in Innovation", was to develop an effective programme to aid wealth-creating innovation by the sharing of practical ideas and successful experience.

In his introductory address, David Davies, Chairman of Johnson Matthey, spoke of the collaboration with universities and research institutes which has been an important element of Johnson Matthey's research and development strategy for many years. Often, such collaboration had resulted from the interest stimulated by the long-established platinum metals loans scheme [see *Platinum Metals Rev.*, 1987, 31, (4), 171-172]. Mr Davies gave a number of examples of commercial products developed with university help, first highlighting the platinum-based drug carboplatin, the discovery of which resulted from the secondment of a Johnson Matthey scientist to Michigan State University, where the initial research was carried out. This work is continuing, in association with The Institute of Cancer Research and The Royal Marsden Hospital.

The innovative approach that Johnson Matthey took during the development of the rhodium-platinum catalysts, which are now widely used for the control of automobile exhaust emissions, was based upon original research at U.K. universities. Connections with these establishments have been maintained

over many years, and Johnson Matthey have recently set up a consortium to co-ordinate academic and in-house research on autocatalysts, and are also providing funds to support such work at selected universities.

It is interesting to recall that as long ago as the 1930s when Dr. Francis Bacon was carrying out his pioneering work at King's College, London, and at Cambridge University on the development of fuel cells as a practical means of generating electricity, he was supplied with activated platinum gauzes by Johnson Matthey. The primitive cell he assembled was the forerunner of the highly sophisticated generators that later provided in-flight electric power for the Apollo lunar and U.S. space shuttles. The success of these units in space resulted in further on-going development which may now lead to the production of commercially viable fuel cells for a wide variety of terrestrial applications.

In his address the Prince of Wales told his audience that he was moved to launch this initiative on innovation because too many of the winners of the innovation award scheme, which he had set up in 1981, failed to achieve commercial success, and he invited his guests to find solutions to the problems that were preventing new ideas, discoveries and inventions being turned into commercial products. In Britain, he said, instances of cooperation were too few; but the Prince cited as a good example of the type of cooperation he would like to encourage, the project involving Johnson Matthey, Rolls-Royce, the Government's Trade and Industry Department and a yet to be selected higher education institute, which intends to produce a fuel cell based on platinum.

By his action the Prince of Wales aims to catalyse the educationalists, the industrialists and the relevant government departments to work together for the benefit of all.