

Holyrood Election Manifesto Briefing



Royal Society of Chemistry – April 2026

As voters in Scotland head to the polls in a pivotal election, it is vital that the chemical sciences sector is recognised as a strategic priority for economic growth, skills, innovation and sustainability.

Jobs growth in the chemistry sector is projected to outstrip the wider labour market by 30% across the decade to 2032¹. The chemical sciences contribute an estimated £2.77bn direct GVA to the Scottish economy, with an average of £111,900 GVA per job for chemistry-using workers.² The next Scottish Government and Parliament need to put in place the conditions for the sector to thrive and capture the growth that can help underpin the Scottish economy. A strong pipeline from primary school through to higher education supported by an unbroken chain of subject experts, a supportive environment for research and innovation and SMEs, and accessible labs across the country developing the capacity the sector needs. Not only can the sector drive the economy, it is also central to tackling key issues around Net Zero and sustainability, finding the solutions to the environmental challenges we all face, and creating a safer, more sustainable, future.

Across the next Parliament the Royal Society of Chemistry wants to see science champions at Holyrood pushing for action on these key areas:

Creating the conditions for the sector to thrive

- Higher education plays a crucial role in delivering the highly skilled chemical science professionals needed for economic growth. The next Government must recognise the strategic importance the chemical sciences play in national resilience, innovation and driving the economy.
- Tackle and prevent potential 'cold spots' in university chemistry provision, ensuring chemistry higher education remains accessible in Scotland. Engage with the RSC on the joint framework on the future of Scottish universities, including utilising the findings of the upcoming report from the RSC on the economic impact of chemistry.
- 77% of the Scottish public believe Scottish Government investment in R&D is important³. Publicly funded R&D provides a return on investment of £8 for every £1 invested⁴. Ensure the next Parliament and Government protects and develops Scotland's R&D eco-system - putting it at the heart of future economic strategies.
- Expand and diversify the pathways into the chemical sciences workforce, such as vocational and technical routes, alongside academic routes, including supporting reskilling the workforce through the 'Just Transition'.
- Ensure there is sufficient funding and access to financial support for, and investment in, innovative R&D-driven SMEs, particularly at scale-up stage.
- Address the critical shortage of laboratory facilities in Scotland, ensuring chemical scientists and businesses can access appropriate laboratory space across the country.

¹ <https://www.rsc.org/policy-and-campaigning/discovery-and-innovation/future-workforce-and-educational-pathways>

² Metro Dynamics: 2026 report on the "Economic impact of chemistry" pre-publication – most recent available economic data is 2023. £2.77bn includes the total direct GVA contribution of chemistry-using workers in chemical sciences, plus the GVA contribution of chemistry teachers and HE staff. GVA per worker (£111,900) excludes teacher and HE staff due to methodological differences in the calculations

³ <https://www.sciencecampaign.org.uk/what-we-do/public-opinion/research/case-public-attitudes-to-rd-in-scotland-and-wales-2026/#benefits>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-value-of-public-rd/the-value-of-public-rd>

Putting the chemical sciences at the heart of tackling sustainability challenges

- Continue the pathway to a circular economy, including embedding a circular economy of materials – improve data collection, support world-class research, invest in and incentivise resource efficient design, invest in infrastructure. To maximise this opportunity the next government must invest in the skills needed to deliver a circular economy, as outlined in the RSC, IOM3 and IChemE 'Jobs and skills for a circular economy' report.⁵
- Devise a long-term roadmap and a stable policy environment to enable investment in research, development, commercialisation and manufacture of sustainable chemicals and materials, to benefit communities across Scotland and achieve green economic growth. Understand the role the chemical sciences can play in delivering Net Zero, utilising the expert knowledge and skills within the sector.
- Implement comprehensive, transparent and adequately resourced monitoring programmes for Contaminants of Emerging Concern (CECs) in water, soils, sediments, wildlife and humans. Monitoring is essential to understanding the scale of pollution, identifying hot spots and assessing long term trends. Seek to find a harmonised approach alongside other UK Governments, for example, standardised monitoring methods and contaminants in scope, to help avoid loss of long-term spatial data sets.
- Continue to tackle the 'Forever Chemicals' crisis through improved reporting and tracking of PFAS, strengthening environmental standards, and working collaboratively with UK Governments on the PFAS Plan.
- Implement additional wastewater treatment to remove CECs from wastewater streams. This could be funded via the polluter pays principle, where industries that use or produce hazardous contaminants, contribute to the costs of their removal.
- Commit to identifying and tackling the other major diffuse sources of CECs in waterbodies, such as pollution from road run-off, waste emissions and agriculture.

A world class chemistry education for our young people

- Ensure the science curriculum is up-to-date and imparts subject knowledge as well as technical and transferrable skills. Utilise the RSC "elements of a successful chemistry curriculum" to inform and lead curriculum development in chemistry from 11 to 19⁶.
- Support schools to provide hands on practical activities as a vital part of their curriculum through sufficient funding for consumables and chemicals as well as enough science technicians. 44% of respondents to the 2025 Science Teacher Survey said their school is understaffed for science technicians⁷ – the next Government must address the funding challenges to close this gap.
- Address the teacher recruitment and retention crisis with long-term solutions that can withstand population and economic fluctuations, and ensure pupils have access to an unbroken chain of subject experts throughout their education.
- Make access to subject specific CPD a priority for teachers and address the ongoing workload challenges. Tackle the shortage of teaching assistants that is having a negative impact on science education.
- Broaden children's horizons and ambitions by ensuring they understand the wide range of careers and opportunities that science enables. Provide teachers and careers professionals with the knowledge to talk about the full range of academic and vocational routes to those careers. Improve data collection and publication to help align workforce planning more closely with real-world demand.

⁵ <https://www.rsc.org/policy-and-campaigning/policy-library/job-and-skills-for-a-circular-economy>

⁶ <https://www.rsc.org/policy-and-campaigning/education/chemistry-curriculum-framework>

⁷ <https://www.rsc.org/policy-and-campaigning/education/the-science-teaching-survey>