Society News

Introducing the Honorary Policy Officer

When I became Chair of the Society’s Policy Committee in 2015, I never expected the area of science and education policy to become so busy. After 3 years as a member of the Committee I was already used to replying to Government consultations and requests for information. However, two General Elections in as many years and a momentous decision taken by the UK electorate to leave the European Union has left most people working in science policy reeling from the almost endless requests for information from the Government. The Policy team at the Biochemical Society is relatively small, being comprised of a science policy officer and Director of Society Programmes.

However, the Society packs quite a punch when it comes to the impact of its policy work, which is largely due to our close working relationship with a number of external policy organizations. Science policy work can be complex, wide ranging, reactive, but very rewarding and represents an important member facing activity for the Society. It is also a vital part of our democracy and the importance of science policy in serving the public interest should never be underestimated.

The policy landscape is often complex and the best results are usually achieved when working in partnership, as issues in science are often broad and cover a number of communities. We work with several learned societies and other organizations, in particular, with the Royal Society of Biology (RSB) and the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE). RSB being an umbrella organisation, with a number of Member Organizations of its own, acts as a leader in policy influencing in Parliament on our behalf, and CaSE leads on the lobbying side. RSB organizes two important annual events at the Parliament, which we take part in – Voice of the Future and Links Day. The former is a great forum for young researchers to meet with ministers and MPs and ask science policy questions. Every year six of our student and early career members get to participate in the event. Applications for the event open in January, so keep an eye out.

Last year following the Society’s Governance Review, we restructured the Policy Committee into the Policy Advisory Panel and founded a new membership body – the ‘Policy Network’ – to support it. We are very keen for our members to input into our policy activities and joining the Policy Network is a great way to find out more about science and education policy developments, as well as to feed your views into our work and consultation responses. It is important that the Policy Network represents the Society’s membership. We welcome interest from members of any grade and based in any country, but in particular I would like encourage our student members, both undergraduates and postgraduates, to get involved. Science policy is a fascinating, ever changing and influential area of work that is well worth being involved in!

Brexit has been a topic of extensive discussion within the science community and beyond for months. It is important that UK remains a world leader in science and attracts the best talent from all over the world. As the Brexit process goes ahead, we hear more and more stories of how it has already impacted scientists in the UK. It is important to capture these case studies so they can be used when lobbying the policy makers. If you have already been affected by Brexit and would like to share your story, please get in touch with the policy team.

Another area that the Society is particularly committed to is equality, diversity and inclusion in science. We run a number of activities in this area, for example, we currently sponsor a Daphne Jackson Fellow and help people returning to work after a career break. In addition, we also support the in2science scheme, providing summer placements for talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Finally, we run a Diversity in Science scheme, which provides small grants to individuals, groups, charities and not-for-profit organizations to support and address issues relating to diversity in science. The scheme is in its 4th year and has already helped to fund a wide range of projects, change to ‘including Native Biochemists, I’m a Scientist, Get me out of here! and LGBTSTEMinar.. This year’s round of grants will open on 1 September. Please visit the Society’s website for more information.

For more information on the Policy Network or any other policy activities, please visit the Society’s website or email policy@biochemistry.org.