Royal Society of Biology News

Making the most of new opportunities

It's been a busy summer at the Royal Society of Biology (RSB) – and activity continues apace as we move into the second half of the year.

With a jam-packed calendar has come a whole host of opportunities too, not just for the RSB, but also for our partners, our individual membership and our Member Organizations, including the Biochemical Society.

Only a month after the General Election we saw another successful Parliamentary Links Day take place at Portcullis House in Westminster. Links Day has always been considered a highlight of the policy calendar, and this year was no exception.

The day brought scientists and government policymakers together, for keynote talks and two panel discussions that were well received by the densely packed audience of researchers, sector leaders, and those from other organisations, including the Biochemical Society.

The theme of this year’s Links Day was, rather aptly, UK Science and Global Opportunities, and the day itself presented not only as an opportunity for researchers to pitch their questions and queries directly to senior leaders in their fields, but also as a chance for there to be an open discussion about important issues relating to science policy. As always, it allowed Learned Societies and their communities to share their views and work together to ensure the best outcomes for their members.

The debate ranged from the challenges being faced by the sector as we approach leaving the EU, through to school teacher quality and retention across the sciences. Science Minister Jo Johnson and Chair-designate of UKRI, John Kingman both highlighted the opportunity to better address the need for more interdisciplinary research through the new research council structure and continued commitment to the Haldane Principle.

The Ministers at the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and the Department for Exiting the European Union with relevant responsibilities, Jo Johnson and Robin Walker, co-chair a high level stakeholder working group on EU exit, universities, research and innovation to which the RSB contributes and we continue to seek the input from across the biosciences to inform our interactions with this and other forums. It is only by working together that we can truly ensure the right messages are communicated.

Academic communication is also a complex activity and recent changes to the ways and means by which it is supported have implications for the research community. Publishing by learned societies is an important way in which they achieve their charitable objectives to communicate and guard their specialisms, and also derive a surplus to invest in meetings, grants and outreach. We recently held a meeting for learned societies to discuss proposals by some UK universities for a Scholarly Communications Licence, and I look forward to engaging as these proposals develop to ensure that they move in a direction that benefits our membership and our Member Organizations. There is a clear appetite for the community to engage with these discussions and RSB will work to communicate this and the principle concerns emerging as the initiative develops.

And finally, we’ve spent much of the summer gearing up for this year’s Biology Week, getting ready to bring biology to audiences up and down the country. Now in its sixth year, the week is a perfect opportunity to not only showcase the amazing and wide world of the biological sciences, but also to reach out to audiences who perhaps are still unaware of the relevance and importance of the subject as a whole.

I invite you, as a member of the Biochemical Society, to join us in celebrating the biosciences during Biology Week (and afterwards!), and using it as an opportunity to share with others the importance of biology not only to yourself but also the wider world.

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(Chief Executive, Royal Society of Biology)

Medal winners at the 2017 International Biology Olympiad