

Society News

Introducing the Honorary Membership Secretary



Nicola Gray (Chair of the Membership and Nominations Committee)

For those of you who don't already know me, I would like to introduce myself as the Honorary Membership Secretary. I have been in role since 2014, when I took over from the irrepressible Frank Michelangeli. In this role, I am lucky enough to work with the Membership team comprising Laura Woodland (Head of Membership Engagement), Rowena Mitchell (Membership Manager) and Lauren Hayes-Clarke (Membership Executive). After several years of substantial growth the Biochemical Society now has approximately 7000 members and supporting them, the subject of biochemistry and the wider molecular biosciences are all core to the activities of the membership team, placing membership at the heart of the Society.

There are a whole host of benefits available to Society members, some are universal whilst others are category specific, please see the website for a full list of member benefits. These range from reduced registration fees at our meetings and training events, to discounts on Gold Open Access article publishing fees for the seven Portland Press journals. At a time when funding is tight, it's also worth remembering that the Society offers a wide range of grants and bursaries for which members can apply. The majority of grants are assessed by the Grants Committee of which I am Chair and it is very helpful to us in this, if you can clearly articulate why attending the specific meeting you are applying for is important, what you aim to achieve there and what the value is of attending for your research/career. When you become a member of the Biochemical Society you also become a member of the Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS). This means that as a Biochemical Society member you can apply for the FEBS Short-Term Fellowships and Long-Term Fellowships depending on your career stage.

In order to better communicate with our members, the Society introduced a network of Local Ambassadors (LAs) over seven years ago. These LAs provide an important conduit to gain insight into changing member needs and opinions which is crucial in helping us shape our member benefits and categories. Under the original scheme LAs were individuals working at key universities who would help inform their communities about the Society, its member benefits, meetings, and activities whilst also recruiting members. We now have 95 academic LAs located in the UK and Republic of Ireland and 23 International Ambassadors across 19 countries. A matching Student Ambassador scheme was also launched in the September of 2016 and 9 individuals have so far been appointed. In 2016 the scheme was expanded to include Industry LAs with the objective of growing the number of members working in this sector and to support the Society's work in better engaging with industry. Each year we host an Ambassador Day, where all LAs from the UK and Republic of Ireland, Industry Ambassadors and Student Ambassadors are invited to meet each other, find out about the Society's latest activities and to share feedback on how myself and the membership team can better support our members as well as them in their roles as LAs. As the LAs are often the Society's first

point of contact with members, they are hugely important in disseminating information, promoting nominations for the Society's awards, raising the profile of the Society's events and recruiting new members, we thank them for their valuable contributions. You can find out who your local LA is at: www.biochemistry.org/Membership/LocalAmbassadors or if you would like to find out more about becoming an LA please contact: membership@biochemistry.org.

The Society's current strategy runs to the end of 2018. To help inform the development of the 2019–2022 strategy, you along with over 600 other members may have completed our survey during June and July which invited members to tell us:

- How well they think the Society supports them
- How well the Society achieves its strategic goals
- What the Society could do better

Thanks to everyone who completed this. The findings will be discussed with Trustees at the Strategy Review in November 2017 and a report detailing the outcomes of the survey and the future strategic plan will be shared with the members.

An important behind the scenes change is the introduction of a new membership fulfilment system. From a member perspective, this should make it easier to join and renew membership. Over the coming months and years, the membership team will be working to develop the system further in order to strengthen and improve your membership experience.

Before the completion of my term at the end of 2018 I will have been involved with many changes to the Society. This includes the restructuring of the Society following the Governance Review, which has resulted in changes aimed to improve the way the Society involves and engages its grassroots membership. Most notably from a membership perspective a Membership and Nominations Committee was formed. The inaugural meeting of this committee took place in June 2017 and at future meetings the Committee will discuss the strategic progression of the Society's membership, seek to maximise opportunities for member engagement with the governance of the Society and oversee the implementation of the Society's strategy through member and public facing activities. The Committee will also review other aspects such as member benefits and advise the Council of Trustees on membership fees. The composition of this committee is representative of the Society's different membership categories and segments and some positions are still available. If you are interested in becoming a member of the Membership and Nominations Committee, you can find out more about the current vacancies here: www.biochemistry.org/AboutUs/CommitteesGovernance or contact the membership team: membership@biochemistry.org.

Finally, nominations for the Society's 2019 Awards are now open (closing on 31 January 2018) and are intended to recognize the achievements of members and non-members across 13 categories. If you would like the work of an exceptional scientist in your network to be recognised, please visit: www.biochemistry.org/Awards – we welcome all nominations and encourage entries that reflect the full diversity of our bioscience community. ■