Local Ambassador – David Timson

David Timson is a biochemist whose research focuses on protein structure and function. He is particularly interested in parasite proteins and how proteins fail to function in inherited metabolic disease. A graduate of the University of Birmingham, he has held post-doc positions in Oxford and Manchester before becoming a lecturer at Queen’s University Belfast. Just over two years ago, he took up his current post as Professor of Biochemistry and Head of the School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences at the University of Brighton.

What motivated you to become a scientist?
Both my parents are scientists and so I grew up in a world of experiments and figuring out how stuff worked. It seemed to be an amazing world and I wanted to be part of it. Apart from an early desire to be a binman, I have never wanted to be anything else.

What inspires you about molecular bioscience?
I love the way biochemistry explains biological problems at the most fundamental levels. Early on at school, biology was always my favourite subject. However, when I did my A-levels I began to really enjoy chemistry and physics. Biochemistry enabled me to use the tools of the physical sciences to address biological problems. Almost all my research and teaching has been at the more chemical end of biochemistry – protein chemistry, enzymology etc. I still get really excited to start with, for example, an interaction between two biomolecules and then build up the story from there to effects on the whole organism.

What are you reading at the moment?
The First Total War by David A. Bell. It’s about the French revolutionary wars. I read a lot of history, but I’m also a fan of the murder mystery writer James Patterson and the science fiction author Peter F Hamilton.

What’s your advice for someone who would like to pursue a career in molecular bioscience?
Go for it (and don’t believe all the negative publicity). It is amazingly varied and often great fun. There will be times when you struggle to meet your goals (see above!) but I have rarely, if ever, seen someone fail to get where they want. I have seen it take some time and many attempts, but persistence normally pays off. My guess is that the best is still to come in molecular bioscience research and that biotechnology will transform this century like computers revolutionised the latter half of the twentieth century. So the demand for good biochemists isn’t going to decline any time soon.

What do you do in your spare time?
Spare time? What’s that? Actually, I’m lucky to live in a nice town by the sea and I have recently got married. So it’s easy to relax walking on the shore and we’re still trying out the local pubs and restaurants. I have tried baking, but I’m not very good at it.

Ambassadors are a key group of members that help us to raise awareness of the Biochemical Society, promote its activities, recruit new members and act as the Society’s point of contact at their institution. If you would like to get involved as an Ambassador, please contact: membership@biochemistry.org.

Synthetic Biology UK

27–28 November 2017, University of Manchester, UK

Synthetic biology has the capacity to transform the industrial landscape in sustainable manufacturing processes across all industrial sectors, including healthcare, sustainable energy, green chemistry and bioremediation.

The 3rd annual SynBio UK conference aimed to showcase UK research in this area and create a focal point for the community, embracing its diversity and fostering its growth and its engagement with society. This year’s conference, organized by the Biochemical Society, was hosted by The University of Manchester’s Synthetic Biology Research Centre, SYNBOCHEM. The presentations from established and young researchers on a wide range of multidisciplinary topics were complemented with short industry talks.

The event kicked off on the theme of responsible innovation and public understanding of science as part of an end-to-end analysis of menthol production using synthetic biology. The topics, which we hoped would inspire new ideas and collaborations, provided a whirlwind tour from yeast metabolic engineering, standard enabled workflows, genetic reprogramming and analytics to microbial metabolism. SynBio approaches to new chemistry and genetic control of mosquitos showcased how SynBio is providing an engine for the new biotechnological revolution. An impressive, energetic and well received number of flash poster presentations were also presented, strengthening the wide range of topics the meeting covered.

Ros Le Feuvre and Eriko Takano (University of Manchester)