

Society News

A Presidential Welcome

Professor Sir Pete Downes succeeded Professor Sir David Baulcombe as the Society's President in January 2018. Pete is Principal and Vice Chancellor of the University of Dundee and was the Society's Chair from 2001–2004.

I am delighted to take up the position of President of the Biochemical Society at such an exciting time. I am encouraged to see how much the Society has achieved during my predecessor's tenure, with initiatives such as the development of the Society's training offering, widening our public engagement activities, a broader programme of meetings covering both core biochemistry and molecular biology and extending to clinical and translational research, as well as the expansion of the Society's publishing activities.

In the time between my terms as Chair of the Society and this year, which marks the start of my presidency, I played a leading role in helping to bring about and establish the Royal Society of Biology. The Biochemical Society has always been at the forefront of change and our relationships with other organizations representing the extraordinary breadth and achievements of the biological disciplines is even more important today. I hope that our Society continues to be forward thinking and outward looking, reflecting the extent to which the molecular basis of life pervades all aspects of biology.

The core of our strength is the membership. And we can strengthen this still further by ensuring that Society membership offers benefits that encourages diversity. We need to give a voice to our student, early career research and non-academic members. So the work underway to ensure that Society membership offers benefits not only to those of you working in academic settings, but also those of you pursuing careers in industry – or indeed in any other setting – will continue to be a priority during my term as Society President.

In advance of taking up this role, I participated in the Society's strategy retreat at the end of 2017, which took the first steps towards considering the Society's strategy for 2019–2021. It was gratifying to see that so many of our members had participated in the 2017 Member Survey, feedback from which was considered as part of our strategy development. You will hear more about the strategy as the year develops.

Some highlights of this year to look forward to in the Society's calendar are:

- Biochemical Society Awards: The recipients of the 2019 Awards will be announced in April.
- Elections for positions on Society Committees: These will be advertised and I encourage all of you to consider how you might get involved in shaping the Society's future.
- AGM: Our AGM will be held in July, watch out for announcements of arrangements for the meeting.
- Public engagement events: You can find details of the Society's public engagement events on our website (www.biochemistry.org/Education/Events) and if you'd like to volunteer at one of these, do contact our Public Engagement Team at education@biochemistry.org.
- I will be representing the Society at the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Congress in Seoul in June and am looking forward to presenting the inaugural Biochemical Society International Award to the 2018 winner, Job Dekker from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and the University of Massachusetts Medical School.
- Voice of the Future and Parliamentary Links Day: Our opportunities to collaborate with our sister societies to influence policy makers and highlight the role of the molecular life sciences in addressing the challenges affecting scientists in the UK.
- Publications: Topics that will be highlighted in *The Biochemist* this year include food and fertility, while our review journals *Essays in Biochemistry*, *Emerging Topics in Life Sciences* and *Biochemical Society Transactions* will feature collections on subjects including mitochondrial diseases, systems biology, and metabolic bioengineering.

Whether you are a member, a future member or someone with an interest in the molecular biosciences, I look forward to working with you as Society President. ■



Pete Downes (President, Biochemical Society)