Royal Society of Biology News

Secure successes for the future of bioscience

It is always good to look ahead. Next year will be our tenth anniversary as an organization, and development of the next RSB strategy is now underway – we will use this to listen to our members and Member Organizations including The Biochemical Society in order to find the best way to deliver a bright future for the bioscience community.

We recently reached an exciting milestone, with the RSB exceeding 18,000 members. Every addition to our biosciences network makes us stronger, and we are more likely to overcome challenges when we work together.

We also saw the handover to our new President – Professor Dame Julia Goodfellow succeeded Professor Dame Jean Thomas after four years of service, and we look forward to working closely with Professor Goodfellow to further build on the incredible foundation of work laid by her predecessors.

With Brexit approaching, there remain many unknowns about the future. Questions about how trade and transport will be regulated have raised key questions about our national biosecurity. Alongside the risk of allowing harmful organisms into the UK is the vital need to efficiently move and trade the products and elements of biotechnology and research.

Capacity to detect and deal with all potential biosecurity threats at our borders would require increased resources, almost certainly beyond our available skills base.

I recently wrote to the House of Lords EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee, in relation to its Brexit: Plant and Animal Biosecurity inquiry to highlight how vital continued collaboration, and movement of information and expertise is for supporting international biosecurity standards and maintaining high levels of biosafety in the UK.

Continued engagement with the bioscience community on this issue will be important and we value input from the Biochemical Society membership.

As an organization we also aim to ensure a better future for bioscientists; providing them with the greatest support possible during their professional life, training and education.

In partnership with the University Bioscience Managers Association, we awarded the HE Biosciences Technician of the Year award to Gill Scott, a technician manager at the University of Warwick who achieves the best for her students.

Through the Heads of University Biosciences, a RSB Special Interest Group, we awarded this year’s HE Biosciences Teacher of the Year to Dr Dominic Henri from the University of Hull, for his terrific enthusiasm and drive for pedagogical development.

These awards allow us to celebrate those who are exceptional in their fields, and showcase the work done by HE practitioners in training the next generation of bioscientists.

Similar values underpin our university degree accreditation scheme, and at the end of April we saw the annual Degree accreditation Award Ceremony, held at the Houses of Parliament. This year, an additional 17 institutions have seen degrees receive accreditation, bringing the total number of institutions recognized to 52, including four outside of the UK.

As well as recognizing high quality bioscience education to degree level, the accreditation scheme highlights academic excellence, drives up standards, and shows that universities are equipping their students with the skillsets that employers value.

It is essential that learning environments are inclusive and supportive. With this in mind, we partnered with several organizations, including The Biochemical Society, to deliver a workshop for academics wishing to pursue an Athena SWAN award. The day saw a number of informative and fascinating sessions on the diversity scheme, and we hope all who attended or viewed online took food for thought back to their institutions.

The continued support and engagement of The Biochemical Society and its membership means we can look forward with confidence to working together to deliver a brighter and more secure future for the biosciences.