

CEO Viewpoint



Kate Baillie

(Chief Executive, Biochemical Society and Managing Director, Portland Press)

In late October, I was invited to a reception at the Royal Statistical Society to celebrate World Statistics Day, a five-yearly celebration of data, statistics and numbers. Statistics is more present than ever in modern molecular bioscience with the rise of so-called 'Big Data' driving forward the genomics revolution and is now classified as a 'vulnerable' skill within the UK bioscience and biomedical science research base due to the importance of making sure that the skill is retained within the community. The Society is responding to the importance of this issue by making it a key theme of our new training programmes, running courses such as June's 'R for

Biochemists' and next April's Quantitative Proteomics and Data Analysis course, the details of which can be viewed on our website.

Maintaining professional skills to help support the next generation of biochemists is an important goal for the Society. The Teacher Industry Partners' Scheme (TIPS) and Teacher Academic Placement Scheme (TAPS) opened for applications in November. These placements provide a unique opportunity for secondary science teachers to extend their knowledge and understanding of the skills required in biochemistry, and the career paths available to bioscience students.

The schemes, which our education team has developed in partnership with the Science Learning Network, will enable schools to partner with local STEM employers (TIPS) and universities (TAPS), providing a one- or two-week work placement for teachers, accompanied by a package of online and face-to-face continuing professional development.

The TIPS scheme already exists in engineering (supported by the Institution of Engineering and Technology and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers), so the Society's involvement will allow this work to be extended into biotechnology. However, the TAPS scheme is brand new and will be led by the Biochemical Society and Science Learning Network.

At the time of writing, the Government Spending Review was looming on the horizon. With cuts of up to 40% threatened, the research community in the UK waits with bated breath. Although the 2010 science budget was in many ways considerably better than expected, the current world leading success of the UK science sector is unlikely to be maintained if significant cuts are imposed.

Science is Vital, a group of concerned scientists, engineers and supporters of science, have been campaigning to try to prevent destructive levels of cuts to research funding in the UK. To show our solidarity with their recent campaign, we submitted a postcard to be printed and sent along with over 1000 others to George Osborne a week before the announcement of the spending review – a symbolic gesture of support for the UK research base.

As always, collaboration with other organizations to help spread the word about molecular bioscience and life sciences more generally is

something in which we actively participate. In November, I represented the Society at a number of sister society events, including the Society for Applied Microbiology's President's dinner and the British Pharmacological Society's annual president's lecture and dinner. This year's lecture by Professor Sir Salvador Moncada, Director of the Institute of Cancer Sciences at the University of Manchester, provided some fascinating perspectives on 'Pharmacology and the understanding of vascular biology: the last 45 years and looking to the future'.

November saw the celebration of the first World Antibiotic Awareness Week. I was given the opportunity to contribute in a small way as a representative of the Learned Society Partnership on Antimicrobial Resistance (LeSPAR) by allowing my desk to be swabbed as part of a UCL-based citizen science crowd-funded project called 'Swab and Send' (<https://ucl.hubbub.net/p/swab-and-send-II>) – a public engagement scheme aiming to get people from all over the country involved in the search for new antibiotics. I await the results with some trepidation!

Collaborative working in the life-science community was also marked by the opening of Charles Darwin House 2 in November. George Freeman, UK Minister for Life Sciences at the Department of Health and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), gave an inspiring talk on the importance of collaboration and of life sciences speaking with one voice. He commended the societies leading the bioscience hub and encouraged us to continue to communicate the importance of life sciences to the wider community and to highlight the UK's achievements in this area.

Professor Tim Dafforn of the University of Birmingham, a Biochemical Society member and former Chair of the Society's Policy Committee, took up his post as Chief Scientific Adviser at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in the summer. He will be the keynote speaker at the Royal Society of Biology's (RSB) Twilight session on 9 December, focusing on how the work of the RSB and its member organizations can foster and enhance academic entrepreneurship, before the annual Christmas Parliamentary Reception later that evening.

Planning for the future of the Society is a focus for me for the next few weeks. In November 2013, the Trustees and Senior Management Team of the Biochemical Society held a retreat to set the strategic direction for the Group over the following five years. On 26 November 2015, we will meet again, to review progress made against those objectives, reaffirm the strategic direction of the society and discuss any new initiatives, to ensure that the Group serves its members and community most effectively.

Following this, on 1 December 2015, the Biochemical Society will hold its Annual General Meeting at Charles Darwin House. In addition to updating the membership on governance and financial matters, it will also provide an opportunity to highlight the progress made in the first two years of the strategy, and communicate the outcomes of the strategy update meeting. The AGM will be followed by the Biochemical Society Award Medal Lecture, which this year is given by Dr Nick Lane, University College London, on the topic of 'The Origin of Life', and a reception to which representatives of other sister societies have been invited, to enable members to network with the broader community ■