

## Royal Society of Biology News

### Working with Government to ensure support for UK research

The Royal Society of Biology has been working to represent the views of its members and Member Organizations in our policy work, as the Government approaches the challenging Brexit negotiations ahead.

We set out our position in a policy briefing on 'Arguments in favour of public investment in UK research and innovation', and were pleased to see the importance placed on research and development (R&D) in the Autumn Statement. The Chancellor said that the UK "does not invest enough in research, development and innovation" and that to amend this, the UK will build on its strength in innovation in science and technology, to ensure the next generation of technological discoveries are made and developed in the UK. The announcements of funding and regulatory support built on the new substantial investment in R&D worth £2bn per year by 2020, revealed shortly beforehand by the Prime Minister.

We welcome the Government's commitments to helping the UK maintain its leading role in R&D. The RSB is keen to continue working with and advising Government to ensure that global collaboration and the international flow of talented people is enabled and supported, and the right regulatory environment created, in order to truly benefit from the financial investment in UK R&D.

In December, representatives from the RSB took part in discussions with Robin Walker MP from the Government Department for Exiting the EU, along with other scientific and conservation charities. The discussion included topics such as funding for research and innovation, continent-wide collaborative programmes, talent recruitment in the science community and the importance of maintaining international environmental standards, as the UK leaves the EU. We look forward to ongoing discussions with Government and others, and to building on collaborative and joint working approaches across the sector.

The provision of scientific advice is a key activity for the RSB and our members. So we were very pleased that the Cabinet Office withdrew from the proposed 'anti-lobbying clause' in their grant standards, which would have restricted publicly funded scientists and researchers from using their expertise to advise MPs and Ministers. As an early intervention in March 2016, I, along with chief executives of eight member Learned Societies, including the Biochemical Society, wrote to

the Cabinet Office Minister Matt Hancock to highlight community concern and seek a solution. We are relieved that Government has listened to the concerns of the community, removed uncertainty, and officially acknowledged that informing policy and public debate is an integral part of the research process.

The RSB's public engagement work brought food experts to Cardiff for a 'Come Dine with the Future' event in November. Five researchers outlined strategies including urban farming, insect eating, GM livestock and rice grown using recycled sewage, in order to create a menu of the future which could sustainably nourish our growing population. We also crowned the hedgehog the Favourite UK Mammal with a huge majority of the 5,000 votes in our public poll; which aimed to highlight population decline and conservation of diverse UK mammals, especially during the winter months.

During World Antibiotic Awareness Week the RSB worked with the Biochemical Society and the Society for Applied Microbiology to run a live tweet chat with AMR experts. The hour-long Q&A was a great success with questions pouring in on everything from farming to diagnostics, to vaccines and phage therapy. It was great to work across audiences to increase engagement and understanding of this important and complex topic. ■



**Dr Mark Downs CSci FRSB**  
(Chief Executive, Royal Society of Biology)



Joint panel discussion event held by the Royal Society of Biology & Sêr Cymru National Research Network for Low Carbon, Energy and Environment