

Royal Society of Biology News

Celebrating Biology Week and taking life science to Parliament



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

In October we celebrated the fifth annual Biology Week with life science celebrations happening all over the UK, including many biochemistry events and activities. The Learned Society Partnership on Antimicrobial Resistance (LeSPAR) of which the Royal Society of Biology (RSB) and the Biochemical Society are members, held a popular Policy Lates event on antimicrobial resistance. Participants examined the roles of innovation and regulation in tackling the AMR crisis from different perspectives, including veterinary research, biotechnology and public health. RSB and the Biochemical Society also organised the Biology Week debate, in partnership with Cancer Research UK. The questions up for discussion: Can we predict people's chance of getting cancer? Should we? attracted hundreds to the Royal Institution to discuss the latest screening and genome sequencing techniques, along with the ethical and societal impact of 'The DNA Revolution'. An audio recording of the event are available on the RSB website now.

This year we have also run several public engagement activities for a general audience, in partnership with the Biochemical Society and our other Membership Organisations (MOs). In June the 'Biology Big Top' went to Cheltenham Science Festival and the Big Bang Fairs in Yorkshire and Humber, and in July we were at Lambeth Country Show. Jointly developed activities as part of 'The Hungry Games' engaged thousands of people from all backgrounds with issues around food security, nutrition, agriculture, food waste and sustainability.

Early in the new year we hope to start working with our MOs on the annual Voice of the Future event. At Voice of the Future, young scientists and engineers quiz key political figures in the Houses of Parliament

about the science policy issues that matter to them. It is a unique event – in no other part of Parliament is the normal select committee format completely reversed so that MPs have to answer questions rather than ask them. The event aims to highlight the importance of policy makers using reliable evidence and being held to account on their decisions and today's young scientists will be vital for this in the future. Last year the Biochemical Society sent along young career researchers who asked the committee, including Science Minister Jo Johnson MP, questions such as: 'How important is scientific advice measured against other forms of evidence in arriving at policy decisions?'

The Drug Discovery Pathways Group, or DDPG, is a partnership of learned societies including RSB and the Biochemical Society that has provided a single well-informed and representative voice on key issues associated with medicines research. The Group's work has focussed on three main areas: industry-academia partnerships, knowledge and skills.

The DDPG has actively sought to influence the policy environment and offer proactive proposals to support drug development. This has included a push to create better cross-sector exchange of information, people and knowledge through mechanisms such as a Drug Discovery Advisory Forum that could bring together medical charities, funding bodies, businesses, academics, the NHS and learned societies, to ensure patients' needs are met in a sustainable and cost-effective manner, and that the UK remains at the forefront of medicines research. There has been significant movement in this direction over the last five years and the DDPG is now considering how best to evolve its own objectives. ■



Biology Big Top at Cheltenham Science Festival



Policy Lates on AMR