

Growing the future: UK Plant Sciences Federation releases its latest report

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The UK Plant Sciences Federation (UKPSF) launched its latest report on 29 January 2019 with a meeting in parliament. *Growing the future* sets out opportunities and priorities for plant sciences in the UK, and how plant sciences are crucial to address some of today's global challenges. UKPSF is a special advisory committee of the Royal Society of Biology, with a wide range of member organisations, including the Biochemical Society. The full report can be found at www.rsb.co.uk/growingthefuture.

Recent years have seen enormous activity in the arena of science policy. The UK Government has committed to work with industry to boost spending on R&D to 2.4% of GDP by 2027 and published its Industrial Strategy, 25 Year Environment Plan, Clean Growth Strategy and Bioeconomy Strategy. The formation of UK Research and Innovation has brought the Research Councils together and the international backdrop against which this takes place is nothing less than the reshaping of our relationship with our European neighbours.

Amid this activity, the UK Plant Sciences Federation (UKPSF) is eager to ensure that the UK's strength

in fundamental research in plant science is recognized, along with the capacity of plant science to address major challenges, for example in health, nutrition, the environment and production.

Growing the future highlights these bold visions to policymakers, funders and others, emphasizing the excellence of plant science in the UK and its importance to the biosciences,

economy and society both at home and around the world. The report draws on input from across the breadth of plant sciences in the UK, asking for examples of the most exciting opportunities arising in research and ambitions for what can be achieved. Taking these important messages to parliament, we launched the report at a breakfast meeting in the House of Commons in January 2019, bringing together leading plant scientists, MPs and peers, researchers and education specialists, along with representatives of government departments and the research councils.

Featuring a foreword from Professor Sir John Beddington that underscores the scale of global challenges, the report highlights what plant science can deliver regarding the improvement of crops and agricultural systems, plant health and biodiversity, plant biotechnology, and biodiversity and ecosystem services. Each area is illustrated with an exciting case study that demonstrates world-leading research by plant scientists in the UK, often in collaboration with colleagues overseas.

The report's conclusions emphasize opportunities to strengthen UK plant science by increasing interactions across disciplines and research settings. The conclusions also draw attention to the importance of international collaboration, call for a balanced debate and public engagement around new methods in agricultural production, and underscore the need for inspiring plant science content in bioscience education—to enthuse the next generation.

Following publication, the UKPSF will continue to make the case that the plant sciences are a broad and vital part of the life sciences and innovation landscape,

Figure 1. *Growing the future* report (Image credit: Royal Society of Biology)



which deliver key societal and economic benefits.

Two strong themes emerged during discussions at the report launch: the importance of representing plants within biosciences education and careers advice, and the need for a sensible public conversation on the use of genetic technologies in plant breeding innovation.

The UKPSF will be developing activities through 2019 and beyond, to address these areas as part of our work to deliver the vision described in *Growing the future*.

The UKPSF is grateful for financial support from the Biochemical Society, Society for Experimental Biology and the British Society for Plant Pathology. The UKPSF was founded with support from Gatsby Charitable Foundation and the Society for Experimental Biology.

If you are interested in finding out more about UKPSF and getting involved with the Biochemical Society's plant science-related policy activities, please contact our Policy & Public Affairs Officer, Hannah Macdonald, at biopol@biochemistry.org. ■



Figure 2. Speakers at *Growing the future* Launch: (L-R) Professor Rick Mumford FRSB, Dr Belinda Clarke CBIOL FRSB, Professor Dale Sanders FRSB. (Image credit: Royal Society of Biology)

Brexit

In the midst of the uncertainty surrounding Brexit, the Biochemical Society remains committed to representing the molecular bioscience community in parliament, and highlighting the importance of continued close collaboration as the UK's future relationship with the EU takes shape. In January, the Biochemical Society fed into the Royal Society of Biology's response to the Science and Technology Committee's consultation on 'Brexit, science and innovation: preparedness for No-Deal' and we continue to co-fund a Brexit Policy Officer post at the Campaign for Science and Engineering, in partnership with several other organizations.



The effects of Brexit manifest themselves throughout the work of the molecular bioscience community. At the time of writing, the nature of the UK's future relationship with the EU and any subsequent impacts on the research sector remain unclear, but there are some particular Brexit-related policy issues to look out for in the upcoming months. These include:

Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe

The Government has committed to guarantee grants from Horizon 2020 for UK recipients in the case of no-deal Brexit. It has also expressed its ambition for the UK to be an associated member in the subsequent EU funding framework, Horizon Europe. As plans for Horizon Europe are finalized, focussing on the benefits of framework membership, in terms of funding and collaborative research to UK science and innovation, will be increasingly on the agenda.

Immigration White Paper

Published in December 2018, the White Paper on Immigration lays out the proposals for post-Brexit immigration to the UK and will be consulted on throughout this year. Ensuring adequate provision for the movement of scientists and technicians is essential to maintain the UK as a leader in scientific research.

Please feel free to get in touch with the Biochemical Society about Brexit or any related topics. We would be particularly interested to hear of any case-studies of projects involving international collaboration. Email us at biopol@biochemistry.org

Plan S: The Society Publishers' Coalition Responds

Plan S, an initiative supported by cOAlition S (an international alliance of research funders), requires that, from 2020, scientific publications that result from research funded by public grants must be published in Open Access journals or platforms.

cOAlition S published their guidance on the implementation of Plan S in November 2018. This was open for consultation until February this year and the Biochemical Society and Portland Press responded jointly with a group of like-minded learned societies, together forming the Society Publishers' Coalition (SPC).

In its response, the SPC expresses support for the principles and ambitions of open scholarship but details some of the challenges for the learned society sector in transitioning to Open Access with Plan S in its current form. The SPC is keen to engage in open dialogue with members of cOAlition S, and its response includes specific suggestions of how cOAlition S can support the Learned Society sector achieve a sustainable transition towards open access.

The SPC's consultation response in full and the Biochemical Society's Position statement on Open Science can be found in the Policy pages on the Biochemical Society website. <http://www.biochemistry.org/Sciencepolicy/Positionstatements.aspx>