

Policy and Public Affairs activity under the Education and Science Policy Committee

Chair: Professor Sarah-Jayne Blakemore FRSB
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Governance

The oversight of the Education and Science Policy (ESP) Committee encompasses all areas of education policy, science policy, outreach and engagement, communication and publishing, and degree accreditation activities of the Society. Membership of the Committee, with turn-over and recruitment spans postgraduate to senior teaching and research members as well as members from the public and private sector. It is one of two Principal Committees of the RSB and reports directly to Council. The role of committee is to develop and review the RSB's strategies, policies and processes that support our policy and public activities in support of our members and our charitable and Charter objectives. Further information on its remit and membership can be found on our website¹. Under the direction of the committee and Chair, the agenda and focus of meetings has developed to meet the evolving policy and communication environment.

This short briefing summarises committee and executive activity beyond the formal report of 2018-19. In the months since March 2020 with the impacts of and response to the COVID-19 pandemic the work of the committee has been wholly conducted virtually with adaptation to online committee meetings and oversight of online events and outputs. Given the high proportion of email and digital communication usual in these areas a good deal of this transition has been smooth but the inability of in-person and public meetings has been a big disruptor of several planned programmes and rapid adaptation was required. Up until March a busy schedule of engagement and meeting activities had fed into policy, public affairs and accreditation activity.

Accreditation

The RSB now accredits more than 700 programmes of study across 50 institutions in the UK. International Accreditation is continuing to grow with seven institutions now accrediting in countries such as China, Mexico and Malaysia. The Accreditation Committee provided [information](#) and [advice](#) in relation to the resumption of practical teaching, no detriment policies and distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic; and this has been published online. In addition, further development of our international offering has progressed with the development of our consultancy package.

Education Policy

A great deal of education policy work on teacher training, skills and retention, as well as subject choice for learners and curriculum for biosciences, both the development of the RSB's own framework for a 5-19 curriculum (a multi-year committee led and consultation-informed project) and review and comment on subject and curriculum development by others, has been ongoing throughout the 2018/19 year and beyond. Since March 2020 this has been added to by a huge need to engage on teaching, exams and progression during the COVID-19 response. Responses and advice has been provided in relation to schooling and exams in all the nations, and T levels, Further Education, BTEC as well as GCSE and A-Levels have been considered. Through the Society's many consultation responses and direct letters and reports we have been clear in championing fairness and enabling progression in current and future years. In particular, the

¹ www.rsb.org.uk/esp

need for multi-year and multi-scenario forward planning rather than a short-term view has been a key theme. An [infographic](#) of some Education Policy activity was published as part of anniversary reporting.

Science Policy

To promote awareness of and access to the science and education policy outputs of the Society and our Member Organisations we created a [searchable library](#) and continue to promote awareness of this resource along with [anniversary infographics](#) and case studies. Animal and plant sciences, research funding, potential impacts of Brexit, genetic technologies, publication policy, diversity and inclusion, biosecurity, career progression, and innovation policy were among a broad range of issues addressed through consultations, letters, reports and engagement. In addition, discussion events such as PolicyLates addressed insect declines, antimicrobial resistance, and innovation in life sciences during COVID-19. The suite of regular newsletters used to share information on policy, research communication and plant sciences was expanded to share information about COVID-19 research and response and to counter misinformation. This COVID Bulletin proved a valued and popular addition according to our recent survey. We have created a network of Diversity and Inclusion champions across all committees and groups to share leading practice and awareness of challenge.

Outreach, Engagement and Communication

An expanded suite of competitions, events, awards, grants and hands-on activities were supported by a range of groups and committees. RSB also worked to bring bioscience organisations together for shared learning and for event delivery. As well as participation in festivals and events that brought contact with audiences outside the usual community of engagement (low science capital), we participated in the Big Bang and helped to raise awareness of excellence in outreach and engagement through our awards programme, thereby reaching and engaging with already-interested communities also. Communication channels have continued to be developed and the already-increasing use of online platforms has accelerated since the COVID-19 lockdown. Our collaboration with ITN Productions now runs to three programmes available on the RSB YouTube channel, which also hosts event and interview recordings. Our Twitter followers now number almost 50k and 8 branches now also have accounts. This presents an important platform for message communication. Anniversary [infographics](#) captured a flavour of activities and of the growing popularity of Biology Week, our annual celebration of the biosciences in October.

Magazine, Monographs and Journals

The Biologist magazine won a prestigious award for specialist magazines and created a special edition to celebrate the RSB's 10th Anniversary with retrospective and interview articles. The increasing popularity of [online material](#) continued to grow with visits to the microsite up by more than the target 50%. A series of interviews with new [COVID-19 researchers](#) has also been an innovative and popular online addition. The magazine has been posted in compostable wrapping since the beginning of 2019 and has had focused articles on the climate and biodiversity crisis throughout 2020. The new Oxford Biology Primer series has become available in print with 10 titles now available and 30 in development; RSB members can avail of generous discounts. The Journal of Biological Education is now in its 54th volume and continues to attract a wide array of international submissions. Emerging Topics in Life Sciences, our partnership journal with the Biochemical Society and Portland Press had a focus issue to mark the RSB Anniversary with all content free-to-read for September.

Natural Capital Initiative

The NCI, a partnership project with the British Ecological Society, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, and the James Hutton Institute, held its third [Valuing our Life Support Systems](#) summit on May 2019 and published a report. The highly successful event achieved ambitions of creating new networks and momentum in discussion between policy, research and business around natural capital themes. Subsequent online round-tables have fed into the review processes of the HMT Dasgupta Review on the economics of biodiversity and a forward strategy and fundraising strategy are being pursued.