

The Society has been very active in the public affairs arena in recent months and has many exciting activities planned for the future. Input from members is always welcome, particularly if they are willing to be included in our database of experts and provide advice and information on specialist areas of microbiology when needed by the media or for responses to consultations. Email pa@sgm.ac.uk

Biosciences Federation

The Biosciences Federation is born!

Readers will have learned from the August 2002 issue of *Microbiology Today* (p. 134) of plans to form a federation of UK life sciences learned societies to enable them to speak with a more unified voice on matters of concern covering the whole spectrum of biology. Following the events referred to in that article, a working party with representatives of some of the larger societies was convened by Sir John Arbutnott and charged with bringing the concept to reality. This duly occurred on 26 November 2002 – The Biosciences Federation now exists, as a Company Limited by Guarantee, Number 4600861. Colin Blakemore is the first President, John Arbutnott the Honorary Secretary and Nancy Rothwell the Honorary Treasurer, with seven other Council members, two of whom – Nancy Lane and John Whittaker – join the three officers to form an Executive Committee. Simultaneously, the UK Life Sciences Committee, which previously carried out some of the functions to be taken on by the Biosciences Federation, but for only a part of the biological spectrum, ceased to exist.

As a matter of legal convenience, the founding members were limited to the Biochemical Society, British Ecological Society, British Pharmacological Society, Linnean Society, Nutrition Society, Physiological Society, Society for Endocrinology and the SGM, but it is hoped that many others will quickly join and all will have an equal status. Several societies are indeed doing so already, including, importantly, the Institute of Biology – a complicated move for them in view of their special position in British biology and their Chartered status. It is expected that very soon the total number of biologists adhering to the Federation via their membership of one of the federated societies will exceed that of the chemists and physicists represented by their professional bodies.

The primary aim of the Federation is to be a national forum that promotes, represents and advances the UK's expertise in the Biosciences nationally and internationally. It plans to do this by promoting liaison and dialogue on common issues relating to research and teaching, by providing opinion and information to assist the formulation of public policy on biological issues, and to promote debate about practical and ethical issues in biology both between biologists and with the wider public. The hope is that the government and others will welcome the Federation as something of a 'one stop shop' for authoritative information and guidance on the many biological issues that hit the media every day.

The SGM welcomes the formation of the Federation and expects to be fully involved in helping to carry out its aims, especially concerning microbiology, as a complementary portal to its own successful activities. The Society plans to play a leading role in the proposed Education Group of the Federation, just as we did when this was part of the UKLSC. There are many practical matters to settle, finances to raise and working relationships with member societies to sort out, but I am confident that this will happen, given the enthusiasm of member societies. We wish the fledgling Federation well.

■ **David Hopwood, SGM President and member of The Biosciences Federation Council**

Consultations

SGM has recently responded to the following consultations:

- The Royal Society Inquiry into *Measuring Biodiversity*
- Department of Health: *Interim Guidelines for Smallpox Response and Management in the Post-eradication Era*

Responses are being collated to the following consultations:

- House of Commons Science and Technology Committee: *The Scientific Response to Terrorism*
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: *A Proposed Strategy for Enhancing Veterinary Surveillance in the UK*
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: *National Scrapie Plan – Scrapie National Flocks Scheme*
- The Scottish Executive: *Health Protection in Scotland*

Microbiology Awareness Campaign

The new campaign is beginning to take shape, with an event planned in Edinburgh to promote relevant local microbiological issues to Scottish parliamentarians and civil servants. It will take the form of short presentations and an exhibition, over a lunch at a central venue in the city close to the Scottish Parliament.

Women in science

The recently published *Set Fair Report*, compiled by Baroness Greenfield for the Department for Trade and Industry, focuses on the retention and progression of women in science, engineering and technology (SET). It concludes that under-representation of women in SET is an issue for society, for organizations and for employers as well as for the individual. Despite the many bodies and programmes that exist to promote the participation of women in SET, their efforts are fragmented and do not always fully achieve their objectives. Amongst a series of recommended actions, the Report suggests the formation of a Working Science Centre to provide information and to bring initiatives together and to reduce duplication. The full report can be downloaded from www.set4women.gov.uk/set4women/research/greenfield-report.pdf

The Athena Project, which aims to promote the advancement of women in science in higher education, has announced the winner of the first Athena Awards. Queen's University of Belfast will receive a substantial cash prize at a ceremony at the Royal Society in February. The award was made for their Gender Initiative which has sparked a culture change across the whole university.

WISE (Women into Science and Engineering) have produced a colourful A3 poster which aims to encourage girls to choose careers in SET. Email wisecampaign@emta.org.uk for further information.