

Education and Public Affairs Section report to the SEB Annual General Meeting - Glasgow, 2011

The Education & Public Affairs (EPA) Section differs qualitatively from the SEB's other three specialist Sections. Although there is overlap between the Plant, Animal and Cell Sections, the EPA Section cuts across all sectors of the SEB with its remit to cover education (pedagogy), training, career development, science communication, outreach, policy, press and publicity. This is a wide and varied sphere of activity and so how much emphasis is placed on any one of these important areas can be a compromise when deploying resources. Previously, our main focus has been to support our younger, early-career researchers and postgraduates, and we continue to place this high on our agenda to secure the career progression of these valued members. Equally, communication of science to the wider public and schools is crucial to the future of bioscience research both in terms of acceptance of new innovations and inspiring the next generation of scientists. This year we are putting these two important activities together by running a number of science communication events:

1. **Science Communication training Workshop** (30 June 2011) – this one-day event will take place in the Glasgow Science Centre with nearly 40 participants who will work together to produce resources to present their research in an accessible way to non-specialist audiences. We are linking this event with the London Olympics 2012 to maximise publicity.
2. The SEB is sponsoring and supporting the **Voice of Young Science (VOYS)** in a workshop to be run in November 2011. The workshop brings together early-career scientists with the aim to help and encourage them to get more involved in public debates especially around controversial scientific issues.
3. After the success of our **radio workshop**, which we ran with the support of BBC Scotland at our previous SEB Meeting 2009, we will repeat this event during our meeting this year. Alun Lewis will once again provide interview experience to early-career delegates who want to practice and enhance these skills.

In addition to these training events SEB will continue to be involved in direct engagement with the public and schools through science festivals such as the British Science Association, Association of Science Education and the Big Bang, and preparation for these activities is already underway.

In 2010, the EPA Section ran its first Symposium meeting on **Food Security** which brought together bioscientists, technologists, ethicists, economists and social scientists to present and discuss the scientific, policy and societal issues associated with Food Security. As a result of this meeting, we will be publishing a number of the presented papers in a special issue of the **Journal of Experimental Botany**.

Plans are already in place for our Symposium Meeting 2012 which will focus on education and teaching. The design, delivery and assessment of teaching programmes in Higher Education is gaining more attention as it moves up the political agenda (particularly in the UK) and this is fixing attention on the science and research of teaching – that is, **pedagogy**.

This research-focused discipline is the study of the process of teaching and our Symposium aims to bring together the latest innovations and best practice at an international level to demonstrate how Higher Education can offer the best provision to its students. We will hold the meeting at our headquarters in Charles Darwin House, London in March 2012.

In addition to the Symposium we will also build on our training-focused events, such as the '**Measuring Biodiversity**' workshop we ran in 2010, by joining up with the Environmental Physiology group of the Plant Section to provide a hands-on technical training workshop in 2012/13 – this is yet to be agreed. Further joint Section events include a '**Science with Impact**' satellite meeting we are planning with the Animal Section which will take place on the day before the start of the SEB main meeting 2012 in Salzburg. We continue to work across all Sections with regard to **policy** whenever it is required throughout the year.

Our **partnerships and collaborations** continue to enhance the work we do as we cooperate with other learned societies and organisations. In particular, we have been working more closely with those societies with which we have signed a Memorandum of Understanding: the Biochemical Society (BS) and the British Ecological Society (BES). The three societies have already co-launched the highly successful Education Policy Lunchbox in 2009 in which prominent policy and education professionals are invited to speak on the latest developments in education to an audience of fellow learned society policy personnel (we now have 90 members signed up). Last year we held our first committee meeting (comprising the three education chairs and staff) to discuss other education activities which would benefit from cross fertilisation. This resulted in the cooperation and involvement of BS and BES in our Science Communication Training event and a new initiative to produce a careers booklet for undergraduate bioscience students and graduates which we are in the process of writing with the involvement of other societies such as the British Pharmacological Society, Physiological Society, Society of Biology and Society for Endocrinology.

This year sees the retirement from our Section of Jean-Pierre Verbelen and Peter Lumsden and we thank them very much for their time and involvement in our work over the past few years. Jean-Pierre, who is based in Antwerp, will be replaced by our first President's Medallist, Teresa Valencak (Vienna), however Peter will continue to work with us as a co-opted member and will be leading the organisation of our Symposium meeting 2012. A further co-opted member who we are welcoming onto the Section this year is Mary Williams of the American Society of Plant Biologists and a former chair of their Education Committee. We are still seeking two more members to join us on the Section so if any SEB members are interested in being involved in the work we do please contact us. To see the current Section members go to: <http://www.sebiology.org/education/committee.html>

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Education & Public Affairs Section