

Strategic plan 2022 – 2027

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The Royal Society's mission – to promote excellence in science and the application of science for the benefit of humanity – remains unchanged since its creation in the 1660s.

The Society has three roles that are key to performing its purpose. It is a Fellowship of many of the world's most eminent scientists and is the oldest scientific academy in continuous existence. It is a registered charity, undertaking a range of activities that provide public benefit either directly or indirectly. As a national academy, it represents the UK and collaborates with international partners to advocate for science and its benefits.

Strategic plan

This document outlines key work programmes for the Royal Society in a context of rapid global change from 2022 – 2027. It does not present a comprehensive statement of all Royal Society activity; rather, it highlights areas where the Royal Society can make the most difference over this period and provides a high-level statement of the Society's plans for how to do so, together with an indication of the Society's priorities in the coming years.

The plan is intended to be a practical aid in prioritising the Society's activity in the near future. It therefore focuses on activity in the next five years. The Society is, and has always been, uniquely well placed to take a longer term view. This perspective will continue to inform all of its work: from investment in early career researchers to policy programmes investigating the implications of emerging technologies.

For simplicity, the plan is founded on five broad areas of work:

- The Fellowship, Foreign Membership and beyond;
- Influencing;
- Research system and culture;
- Science and society;
- Corporate and governance.

The Society's work across these domains is, in fact, interdependent. For instance, the Society's ability to influence rests upon its reputation, which rests upon its track record in identifying and supporting excellence in the research system, which in turn rests upon strong election and governance processes etc. The plan should be read as a whole which, it is hoped, is greater than the sum of its parts.

The strategic context

The context within which the Society is operating is one of rapid change presenting a complex set of challenges and opportunities.

Globally, decision-makers are confronted by exceptionally complex issues with significant scientific dimensions, including climate change, the degradation of the biosphere and the prospect of further public health emergencies.

The rise in populism and nationalism risks discrediting the rational basis of science. Challenging geopolitical movements constitute a threat to the openness and freedom which have underlain decades of extraordinary scientific discovery, and threaten the networks and investment that are necessary for international collaborations.

There are widespread challenges in the culture of science including potential threats to academic freedom, concerns about rising bureaucracy, and the presence of perverse incentives that are working against real quality in research. Meanwhile, the nature of research is changing rapidly with the accelerating impact of digital technologies.

With Brexit and the recent reduction in ODA commitments, the UK's position in the world is uncertain and perceptions of the value (and indeed trustworthiness) of the UK as a science partner are shifting. There have been a number of high-profile initiatives to attract talent to the UK, but these need to be complemented by a sense of the importance of mobility from within the UK to other countries and of the need to strengthen the internal pipeline of talent.

Within the UK, we are seeing the emergence of new models of science and innovation funding and there have been rapid and frequent changes in the policy landscape, both with respect to science itself and areas affected by it. More certainty regarding long-term plans for the research environment is critical for the research community and for the individuals who make it up regarding their own career paths.

The Royal Society's role

The Society's independence, stature and reach means it is unusually well placed to work in pursuit of its objectives in this context.

The following four considerations will inform all of our work:

- **Independence**
The global reach of the Royal Society and its intellectual and financial independence give it unique scope to influence and to provide leadership in science.
- **Partnership and convening**
The Fellowship represents excellence across the research landscape and beyond, providing an invaluable resource in building interdisciplinary and other partnerships to effect change.
- **Equality, diversity and inclusion**
Throughout the period of this plan, the Society will take an integrated approach, placing these themes at the centre of all its work, informed by their importance in driving the quality of science and decision making.
- **International and global focus**
Almost all the Society does has a global dimension (amongst other activities, its publishing operation and its grants programmes). The Society will embed this perspective across the range of its work.

Strategy

MISSION

To promote excellence in science and the application of science for the benefit of humanity

ROLE

Fellowship

Charity

National academy

PRINCIPLES

Independence

Partnership and
convening

Equality, diversity and
Inclusion

International and global
focus

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



The Fellowship,
Foreign Membership
and beyond



Influencing



Research system
and culture



Science and society



Corporate and
governance



The Fellowship, Foreign Membership and beyond

Fundamentally, the Society is its Fellowship. None of the elements of this strategic plan can be delivered without an excellent, diverse and engaged Fellowship and Foreign Membership. They sit at the centre of wider networks of excellence which are also critical to the Society's work, including its University Research Fellows, other grant recipients and the many experts who provide critical input to Society projects. Fostering more dynamic interactions between these groups will strengthen the Society.

In this domain the Society will be working to secure the following outcomes:

- A Fellowship and Foreign Membership that is representative of scientific excellence in all its forms (including in industry, innovation, engineering, technology and medicine);
 - A Fellowship and Foreign Membership that is closely engaged in the work and decisions of the Royal Society;
 - A Royal Society that understands in depth (and makes best use of) the remarkable resource that the Fellowship, Foreign Membership and its many grant holders represent;
 - A Fellowship and Foreign Membership engaged in strong collaborative networks beyond the Society, with leaders in research, industry, innovation, and administration.
- supporting a working group considering the issues regarding election for candidates from industrial and comparable backgrounds;
 - implementing the recommendations of those working groups;
 - reviewing the impact of these changes in elections, and refining the approach if necessary.
- Hold a series of Fellowship forums with Officers and Council across the UK exploring Fellows' perspectives on the work of the Society and its work programmes.
 - Build a closer relationship with the Fellowship with:
 - an overhaul of the Fellowship database giving the Society and its Officers a richer understanding of Fellows' experience and interests;
 - the launch of an annual survey of the Fellowship seeking feedback on the role and performance of the Society.

Commitments

The Society will:

- Deliver a work programme to ensure the Fellowship is representative of scientific excellence in all its forms and contexts, by:
 - creating Search Committees shadowing individual Sectional Committees, charged with securing nominations for strong candidates from diverse backgrounds;
 - supporting a working group to develop recommendations on the size of the Fellowship and Foreign Membership;
- Continue to enhance the involvement of Fellows, grant recipients and others in the life of the Society, including the development of an engaging programme of events in Carlton House Terrace and around the UK and the effective facilitation of elections. The Society will operate in a spirit of continuous improvement and will also conduct a more formal review of its service to the Fellowship (comparing it with similar organisations) during the period of this plan.



Influencing

Since its inception the Society has been a leader in supporting informed and evidence-based decision making in government and beyond.

In this domain the Society will be working to secure the following outcomes:

- Decision making by those who frame policy for science is informed by a rich evidence base and sets a strong framework for excellence in research and innovation;
- The case for investment in science and innovation is widely understood in all relevant sectors;
- The Royal Society is an active contributor to debates relating to matters where science has an important perspective to offer, improving decisions at all levels of government and beyond;
- Royal Society advice on policy relating to global challenges is recognised and effectively used in bilateral and multilateral fora.

Commitments

The Society will:

- Deliver a major programme of work over the timescale of this plan to ensure the health of the policy environment for science, influencing governments at all levels and major actors in key sectors to secure a system that supports excellence in science. This will entail:
 - continuing to make an evidence-based case for the importance of curiosity-led science both for its intrinsic value and as a source of the breakthroughs and innovations that enable science to tackle fundamental challenges;
 - articulating the critical importance of applied and challenge-driven science, engineering and technology;
 - developing a new innovation policy programme for implementation over the period of this plan, working closely with Fellows and others with deep expertise in the innovation process, fully exploiting synergies with the Society's existing industry programmes (including Entrepreneurs in Residence) and supporting a comprehensive and coherent skills agenda across the country;
 - focused influencing work providing timely evidence and analysis to inform short-term policy decisions in science. At the time of writing, key issues include the relationship between the UK and Horizon Europe, the mobility of researchers into and out of the UK and the implementation of the UK government's commitments to expand research and development expenditure. The issues will evolve rapidly and Officers and Council will work to ensure the Society's interventions are effective, and will report regularly to the Fellowship on its work.
- Support a high-profile programme of activity to bring a greater awareness of the scientific evidence to key global Issues, with decision makers operating at all levels, including multilateral global organisations. Priorities in the short term will include data, climate change, net zero and energy, genome editing and biodiversity. The Society's work will include events, publications and public engagement activity regarding these issues. The Society will keep subject areas under review with the potential to address other major challenges (eg the implications of an ageing population).
- Look beyond the immediate horizon to understand the implications of new technologies and innovation models, highlighting challenges and issues for decision makers in all fields, including government, industry, and beyond, building on existing projects.



Research system and culture

Since its early focus on the application of the experimental method, the Society has been a leader in shaping the character of the scientific enterprise. This part of the plan will address forthcoming activity directly addressing issues in the culture and conduct of science.

In this domain the Society will seek to secure the following outcomes:

- There is a healthy environment for continued scientific discovery and application in the UK and beyond;
- The Society is recognised internationally as a visible leader on open science, academic freedom, and integrity in science;
- People from diverse, non-traditional backgrounds are encouraged and supported to take up scientific and technical careers and enabled, through an inclusive culture, to progress to leadership positions and/or make positive contributions to the wider innovation agenda through appropriate development of skills;
- The research system treats people fairly and rewards the full range of scientific activity (in the broadest sense of the words) that benefits society;
- The UK develops an enduring reputation for being a magnet destination for partners and for talented researchers from all over the world who are attracted by the strength and benefits of the UK research system and the career opportunities it offers.

Commitments

The Society will:

- Continue to highlight that science is key to the sustained prosperity, resilience and wellbeing of society and to push for a long-term consensus on the funding, governance and direction of the UK science system.
- Continue to support excellence directly through existing grants programmes, through its fellowships, an expansion of international fellowships, capacity-building grants, grants to promote international collaborations, and will explore the scope to expand awards aimed at more diverse groups.
- Use the full range of levers at its disposal to promote a research culture that fosters excellence and quality. This will include:
 - a series of research culture events with major partners exploring issues in research culture (research integrity, academic freedom, etc) with a view to mobilising actors across the research system (funders, publishers, universities, international partners);
 - continuing with the full transition to open access for Royal Society Journals when they reach 75% open access article output;
 - providing leadership in trialling initiatives to promote quality in publishing, testing approaches founded on the constituents of excellence in scientific practice including and fostering open peer review, open data, and reproducibility;

- consulting with the Fellowship with a view to the delivery of an outstanding programme of scientific discussion meetings in cutting edge areas of science and innovation;
- the introduction of a Royal Society research culture award to recognise wider contributions to the research community.
- Support more coherence and fairness in scientific careers, including:
 - making the case for and, if funding is forthcoming, delivering a significant new programme of mid-career fellowships to be offered alongside University Research Fellowships and Research Professorships;
 - a programme of work to explore and recognise the contribution of technicians and other ‘behind the scenes’ research workers to the scientific enterprise, including the rollout of an annual Royal Society Hauksbee award, and initiatives to illustrate the contribution of wider teams to key scientific achievements;
 - working through our education programmes to support the pipeline of entrants to scientific careers;
 - supporting the development of technical skills post-16 (including adult upskilling) to ensure there is the right level of technical support for researchers and innovators in both higher education and industry.
- Give a stronger voice to, and listen more effectively to, early career researchers. The Society will, for instance, oversee, with the six other national academies of the UK and its constituent nations, the creation of a Young Academy from 2022. The Society will partner with the Academy to apply insights from early career researchers in areas across the range of the Society’s work, across the period of this plan.
- Work for greater equality, diversity and inclusion in the scientific workforce at all levels. The Society, its Officers and Diversity Committee will take an integrated view of the Society’s programmes (internal, Fellowship and outward-facing) continue to develop a strategy for delivery with our partners.

Science and society



The Society has a long tradition of engagement in scientific matters with communities beyond the world of research.

In this domain the Society will work to secure the following outcomes:

- Debate on important societal and global issues is well informed by relevant science, including the recognition of uncertainties;
 - Decision makers are better informed by science and benefit from stronger public understanding of science, founded on constructive public discourse regarding aspects of science that will impact the lives of current and future generations;
 - Citizens of all ages are inspired by scientific possibilities and achievements, enhancing participation in science, and demand for its benefits in shaping our lives and our future.
- Commitments**
- The Society will:
- Maintain its long-standing approach to wider public engagement and two-way dialogue through initiatives including the Summer Science Exhibition and scientific heritage programmes.
 - Continue to deliver the Science and the Law programme that has brought scientists and the senior judiciary together, learning from its approach to extend the Society's offer to other leading sectors of public life in the UK and beyond.
- Work to develop synergies between the Society's global issues programmes (see page 6) and public engagement programmes on matters including climate change and biodiversity with a view to promoting greater insight through dialogue.
 - Build on experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic to develop a focused strand of work throughout the period of this plan addressing the nature of science, and discourse regarding science, addressing themes such as risk, uncertainty, and the character of the scientific method.
 - Continue with partners as appropriate to work on education policy and projects in schools to develop a more inspiring and effective STEM education system in the UK, extending beyond school education to further education, apprenticeships and adult education, including:
 - making the case for a renewed framework for education research with a view to building a stronger evidence base on effective action to promote a scientifically and technically literate workforce;
 - expanding the partnerships grant programme accompanied by evaluations of the scheme to highlight areas where good practice in bringing direct engagement with practical science and STEM careers in schools might be adopted more widely across the education system.



Corporate and governance

The Society's ability to deliver these programmes rests on a wide range of co-ordination and support services.

The key outcome in this domain will be to secure a Society that has the capacity and resources to deliver on all of the proposals outlined in this plan.

Commitments

The Society will:

- Work towards the highest standards of charity governance by:
 - continuing to review processes surrounding elections and appointments of Officers to reflect current recruitment good practice including implementing the recommendations of the report to Council by Lord Neuberger FRS (2021) regarding the rules for the election of Presidents;
 - convening a Fellows' working group to review the Statutes and Standing Orders to align these with current best governance practice;
 - supporting Council in a long-term programme to improve Council's ways of working (continuing to assess the Society against the Charity Governance Code throughout the period, where work will include a skills audit of Council);
 - working with Committee chairs to conduct a stocktake of existing Royal Society activity in 2022 – 2024 to align resources more closely to the outcomes identified in this plan.
- Pursue the following initiatives relating to human resources and culture:
 - develop a new human resources strategy to reflect the needs of an organisation that has expanded significantly, addressing the recruitment pipeline, retention, diversity and changing work practices;
 - implement a work programme to address the findings of a recent review regarding the experience of Society staff from black and minority ethnic backgrounds;
 - work to promote the Society's values (we make a difference, we strive for excellence, we respect each other, we are collaborative), engaging staff, the Council and the Fellowship.
- Develop a fundraising strategy that enables the Society to maintain its independence and pursue the ambitious programme of activity outlined in this plan. This strategy would be subject to approval by Council based on dialogue with the Fellowship at Fellowship Forum events.
- Continue to develop its digital capabilities:
 - building resource for the delivery of high-quality hybrid events as an integral aspect of all its work programmes;
 - continuing to review the website and other digital platforms to provide more visibility and an improved customer experience.
- Develop a plan for attaining, over an achievable timescale, a reduced environmental footprint for the conduct of the Society's own activities.

Accountability

This is the President's and Council's strategic plan for the coming five years.

The Society will:

- Develop management and financial information systems to provide Council with effective oversight of the delivery of the plan;
- Keep the plan under review, adapting as appropriate to changing circumstances;
- Report annually to the Fellowship on achievements and relevant developments.



The Royal Society is a self-governing Fellowship of many of the world's most distinguished scientists drawn from all areas of science, engineering, and medicine. The Society's fundamental purpose, as it has been since its foundation in 1660, is to recognise, promote, and support excellence in science and to encourage the development and use of science for the benefit of humanity.

The Society's strategic priorities emphasise its commitment to the highest quality science, to curiosity-driven research, and to the development and use of science for the benefit of society. These priorities are:

- The Fellowship, Foreign Membership and beyond
- Influencing
- Research system and culture
- Science and society
- Corporate and governance

For further information

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