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A new umbrella body for British biology

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The many different voices representing British biology are due to be united for the first time next week, with the launch of the new [UK Biosciences Federation](#).

The federation, which will be similar to the [Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology](#) (FASEB), will be inaugurated in the House of Commons on September 15. The organization aims to bring together the 100,000 active life scientists in the United Kingdom. It will lobby government and represent the full range of biological sciences.

The federation already has more than 61,000 members, putting it on a par with its more established American counterpart, which has 60,000.

Biology has traditionally been much more fragmented than the other 'hard' sciences in the United Kingdom, with more than 100 learned societies, each focusing on a particular specialty. The new coalition aims to give the sector more definition and reduce the inevitable duplication of work across different societies.

Peter Cotgreave, director of the [Save British Science](#) campaign group, told us, "I do think the plethora of different biology organizations have got themselves into a situation where they don't have the force of voice that an organization like the Royal Society of Chemistry has."

The idea for a federation has been under discussion for more than 5 years, hampered by the divided nature of the sector. "Some societies were enormously supportive of the federation, and others were nervous about loss of identity," the organization's treasurer, Nancy Rothwell, said.

Colin Blakemore, the current president, has kick-started the federation. But he will reluctantly step down from the position in October, when he takes over as the [new chief executive of the Medical Research Council](#). An announcement about his replacement is expected soon.

The federation is currently trying to secure additional external funding to address the [teaching of biology in schools](#). It is holding its first education colloquium in London next month, where issues such as the mismatch between school science and university expectations will be debated.

Another key issue on the agenda is [animal research](#). The federation will campaign for improvements to the strict regulations currently binding this type of research. It has been conducting a survey of times taken to receive new and revised home office licenses for work in this area.

Rothwell said, "The issues range from publicity and education about the use of animals in medical research - because there is so much misinformation out there - to helping and supporting researchers in that area."

The coalition is also keen to develop an international perspective. "One growing concern is EU legislation," Rothwell explained. "There is a feeling that the UK community is not well prepared and doesn't lobby well."

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