

Rt Hon David Willetts MP  
Minister of State for Universities and Science  
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills  
1 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0ET

29<sup>th</sup> June 2012

Dear Minister,

The Society of Biology is pleased to welcome the comprehensive and balanced recommendations of the Finch Report and in particular its focus on developing a sustainable system to extend access to the results of research. We believe that greater sharing of peer-reviewed and quality-assured information will bring benefits for the originating researchers, for readers, and ultimately for society.

As a learned society with reader, author, reviewer, editor and publisher members we view these topics from a broad perspective and our overriding objective is to see the continuation of productive research for social benefit. Learned societies play a vital role in developing and enhancing the careers of talented researchers, and in creating an environment in which their research can flourish, and be appreciated and used. Thereby they have enhanced the UK's environment for research, its international prestige, and its earnings gained from knowledge generation and use.

We ask that in the coming evolution of publishing driven by open access policies the positive input of the learned societies to these key elements of growth be held in mind. The Finch report explicitly recognised this need in saying that

“...it is of the utmost importance during the transition to sustain the world-leading status and performance of the UK research community. That success is underpinned by the support that researchers receive from learned societies in the UK, and by systems to ensure that they have effective and high-quality channels through which they can publish and disseminate their findings. These are key elements in an ecology of international co-operation and competition that helps researchers to perform to the best standards, not least by subjecting their findings to rigorous peer review. Those key elements must not be put at risk.” (8.3)

The science research community, like many others, is keenly aware of the pressing need for growth and development to support the economic and cultural needs of society. Science and technology are critical to this goal and the pillars supporting these efforts at present will remain essential as we advance. Much of the net investment made by learned societies in the UK higher education sector through fellowships, grants, conferences and communication activities is derived from the

export earnings of scientific publishing. Although not on the scale of public purse funding, these investments are significant not only in the value of their tangible outputs, where other funding routes are often unavailable, but also in their value for cohesion across the sector, bringing grass roots skills and know-how together as a focus for policy advice, training and professional development. In addition, the learned society sector employs in excess of 10,000 staff.

Learned society publishers are often small and operate with modest reserves. It is clear that all will need to adapt to a new environment, and while some are already trail-blazers, many are as yet unprepared. We ask you to urge early policy clarity and enabling mechanisms from public funders, especially Research Councils and the Higher Education Funding Councils in relation to their requirements in order to afford the necessary time for the redesign and renegotiation of publishing practices which may be required. At present the degree of uncertainty around likely market change is sufficient to confound many attempts to plan. There is concern that realistic market rates for publishing charges have not yet been established in some areas and that funder flexibility in accommodating author choice may need to be addressed in the near future.

We urge you to work with European, US and other agencies to promote the Finch approach and thereby spread the potential benefits of extended access to even wider constituencies as well as enhancing the development of sustainable learned communication and support systems. Through our membership the Society of Biology reaches 80,000 life scientists, and we benefit from more than 60 learned society members who, collectively, publish over 70 scientific journals. We are keen to actively engage with Government's policy and operation plans for extended access and data mining and to assist in achieving the sustainable, robust and pro-growth environment for research and development which we all seek.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Mark Downs FSB FLS**  
**Chief Executive**