

SOCIETY FOR NATURAL SCIENCES

NEWSLETTER 2026 (# 1)



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Welcome to the Society for Natural Sciences Newsletter.

We are delighted to welcome all new members joining our growing interdisciplinary community. The Society continues to bring together students, educators, and researchers who share a passion for breaking down disciplinary boundaries in science.

If you are new here, or even if you've been part of the community for a while, we warmly encourage you to get involved. Whether that's contributing an article, sharing opportunities, or helping shape future events, your voice matters.

If you would like to contribute to future newsletters, share news, or get involved with the Society, please contact us at: contact@socnatsci.org

And if you know colleagues or students who would benefit from joining an interdisciplinary science network, please do spread the word - we are always keen to grow our community.

With best wishes,
The SocNatSci Editorial Team

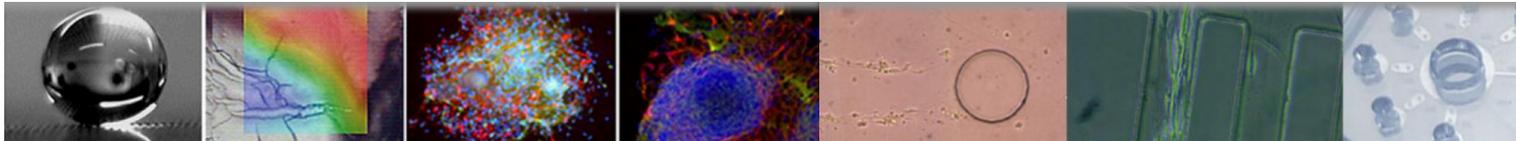
EVENTS & DATES

A number of upcoming events provide opportunities to engage with teaching, research translation, and interdisciplinary practice:

- **SocNatSci Annual Conference 2026** - [link](#)
- **SocNatSci Pedagogical Research (SoTL) Seminar Series**
 - Monthly online seminars (final Thursday, 13:00–14:00)
 - Delivered in collaboration with Advance HE
 - Assessment strategies
 - Interdisciplinary teaching
 - Student skills evaluation
 - Includes live discussion + recordings for members
- **SocNatSci Community: Seminars and Teaching Practice**

[Register / Event details](#)

The meeting showcases advances in organoids, microphysiological systems, and next-generation *in vitro* models—areas that are increasingly shaping both **research practice and how we teach experimental science**.



The Society for Natural Sciences continues to play an important role in connecting educators across disciplines. Their **Pedagogical Research (SoTL) Seminar Series**, delivered in collaboration with Advance HE, provides a regular forum for discussing teaching practice, assessment, and interdisciplinary education.

These monthly online sessions (typically held on the final Thursday of the month) bring together educators to share approaches to:

- Interdisciplinary curriculum design
- Assessment and feedback strategies
- Embedding transferable skills in science degrees

In addition, the Society's broader seminar programme, including the Chanel Talent seminars, offers a useful bridge between research, outreach, and education, making them particularly valuable for those working across teaching and public engagement.

The SocNatSci community also provides a natural home for education-focused outputs, including case studies and scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) work aligned with interdisciplinary science.

○ **Inspiring Minds – Loughborough University (1 April 2026)**

The *Inspiring Minds* event at Loughborough University brings together educators, researchers, and students to explore innovative approaches to teaching and research engagement. These events typically focus on **inspiring the next generation of scientists**, with strong links to outreach, pedagogy, and widening participation.

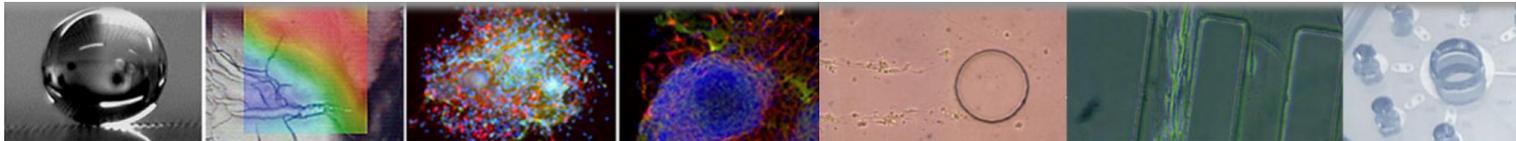
○ **ELRIG UK Forum – Loughborough University (22 April 2026)**

The European Laboratory Research & Innovation Group will host a major forum titled “*Innovations in Translational Models: Replacing In Vivo Models with Complex Cellular Systems*” at Loughborough.

This free, open-access event highlights the shift toward **human-relevant, cell-based and animal-free models**, bringing together academia and industry to discuss emerging technologies and their implications for research and training.

[Register / Event details](#)

The meeting showcases advances in organoids, microphysiological systems, and next-generation *in vitro* models—areas that are increasingly shaping both **research practice and how we teach experimental science**.



OPPORTUNITIES

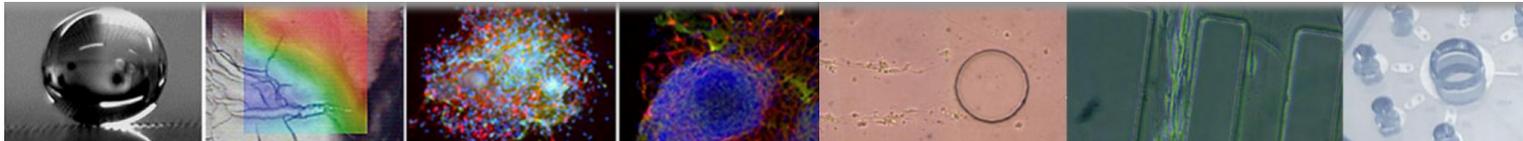
There is a growing ecosystem of funding, recognition schemes, and community events supporting innovation in teaching and education, particularly for interdisciplinary science. From national organisations to internal university schemes, these opportunities can help seed new ideas, support curriculum transformation, and build communities of practice around teaching

At a national level, organisations such as the Institute of Physics and Advance HE continue to provide structured routes into teaching innovation. The Institute of Physics offers a broad portfolio of grants that support outreach, engagement, and education-focused projects, alongside targeted funding to widen participation and support inclusive teaching practices. In parallel, Advance HE provides fellowships, professional recognition, and development programmes, as well as periodic innovation funding calls aimed at enhancing student success and curriculum design.

Alongside these national schemes, it is worth highlighting that internal university pedagogical funding is often underused. Many institutions offer small but agile grants for teaching innovation, digital learning, interdisciplinary curriculum development, and EDI-focused initiatives. These can be particularly powerful when used to pilot new ideas that later feed into publications, external funding, or broader institutional change.

- **Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)**
 - Vacation bursaries and funded placements via universities
 - Often embedded within departmental research programmes
 - Check with local departments for EPSRC-funded summer projects – contact specific university departments to apply
- **Nuffield Foundation Research Placements**
 - Well-established UK-wide scheme
 - Paid summer placements (typically 4–6 weeks)
 - Open to Year 12 / early undergraduate students
 - Strong emphasis on widening participation

<https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/students-teachers/nuffield-research-placements>
- **Wellcome Trust**
 - Biomedical vacation scholarships
 - Opportunities in labs across the UK
 - Ideal for interdisciplinary bioscience students
 - Check university-hosted Wellcome summer schemes– contact specific university departments to apply
- **Royal Society**
 - Summer Science Exhibition & outreach opportunities
 - Research fellowships and engagement funding
 - <https://royalsociety.org>



A MESSAGE FROM AI

Thanks for your request to draft a satirical piece for the Society for Natural Sciences newsletter, focusing on current trends in Natural Sciences at higher education (HE) institutions. Drawing on recent internal documents, emails, and sector-wide commentary, here's a playful yet pointed draft that could fit well under a satire section title like **"The Irreproducibles"** or **"Peer-Reviewed Nonsense"**:

The Irreproducibles

"Natural Sciences in HE: A Field Guide to Surviving 2026"

Welcome to 2026, where Natural Sciences in higher education is thriving, innovating, and—if the data dashboards are to be believed—marginally less confusing than quantum entanglement.

Let's begin with the **Annual Programme Review (APR)**, that sacred rite of passage where academics gather to reflect on the year's triumphs, tribulations, and the number of assessments returned within 20 working days (spoiler: still waiting on that data [\[1\]](#)). As Dr Cheryl Hurkett so eloquently put it, "I thought it best to circulate everything else now"—a phrase that may soon replace "publish or perish" as academia's unofficial motto.

Meanwhile, the **Society for Natural Sciences** continues its noble mission to promote interdisciplinary science education across the UK. This year's outreach highlight? A call for volunteers to coordinate Channel Talent webinars—six one-hour sessions that combine recruitment, research, and the faint hope that someone, somewhere, understands what "Natural Sciences" actually means [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#).

On the digital frontier, universities are embracing **AI-powered learning analytics, gamified pedagogy, and chatbots with more emotional intelligence than your average exam board** [\[4\]](#). Students can now receive feedback from an algorithm that never sleeps, never eats, and never forgets to flag a comma splice.

And let's not forget the **NSS 2024 Data Pack**, which offers a thrilling decile-by-decile breakdown of student satisfaction. Because nothing says "student-centred learning" like a spreadsheet that maps your happiness to a Common Aggregation Hierarchy [\[5\]](#).

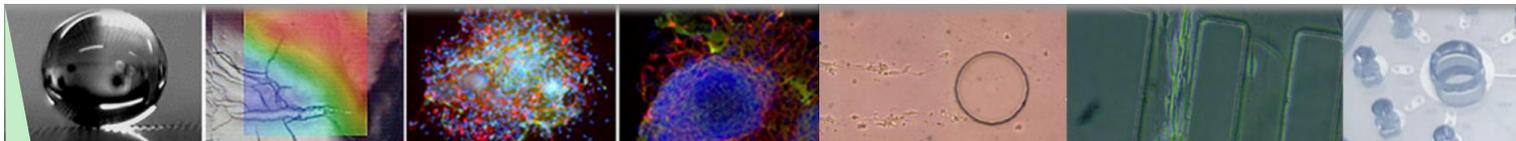
In summary, Natural Sciences in HE is boldly going where no discipline has gone before—into a future of hybrid learning, ethical approval forms, and sustainability KPIs. So, grab your lab coat, your login credentials, and your sense of humour. You're going to need all three.

Would you like this adapted for a specific audience—students, staff, or external readers? I can also tailor the tone further (more biting, more whimsical, more academic) depending on your preference.

References

- [1] Natural Sciences APR - first draft for comments
- [2] [Society for Natural Sciences](#)
- [3] [Society for Natural Sciences - Outreach](#)
- [4] [Emerging Trends in UK Higher Education: What to Expect in 2026](#)
- [5] [NSS 2024 Data Pack - Natural Sciences](#)

With thanks to Sarah Gretton for providing the AI prompt.



INAUGURAL LECTURE

Professor SARAH GRETTON (pictured right) gave her inaugural lecture at the University of Leicester on March 25 where she is the director of the Education Academy. Sarah has played a leading role in the development of the Society from its inception. She currently chairs the Society's PedR/SoTL subcommittee.



NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE TEACHING OF NATURAL SCIENCES is the Society Academic Journal publishing articles of interest across the science disciplines in higher education. There are two main sections: Research Directions for pedagogic research and Community Directions for shorter articles of general interest. The online journal is free to publish in and free to read. For more details visit the web site or contact the editor Sweta Lada.

CHANNEL TALENT

Opportunities still exist for outreach presentations on the Channel Talent platform. The purpose is to disseminate information about opportunities in natural sciences in HE to support recruitment to Natural Sciences degree programmes. Presentations, online, are around 40 minutes on an interdisciplinary subject of the speaker's choice, usually related more or less to their research with an introduction to Natural Sciences in HE (slides provided). We encourage speakers to note any relation of their content to the A-level syllabuses in the sciences either in the talk or in follow-up notes on the SNS web site.

The infrastructure is managed by Channel Talent.

We would like to open up opportunities to present to postdocs and PhD students as well as academic members of staff.

Please let me know if you are willing to present or would like to discuss this further.

Derek Raine (ceo@socnatsci.org)

Stay connected with the Society for Natural Sciences community, join the society, share your work, promote your events, and take part in upcoming activities.

- Become a member, submit content for future newsletters, or advertise opportunities within the network.
- Attend our events and seminars to connect with colleagues across disciplines.
- Follow us on social media to stay up to date with the latest news and opportunities.

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If you would like to join the team or help in the production of the newsletter do let us know.