



## **Report from UK Biology Competitions**

### **for the AGM of the Society of Biology, April 2010**

The first report of UK Biology Competitions (UKBC) must necessarily explain how UKBC has come into being as well as providing a comment on the progress of the components. The components are rather better known, particularly the longer-standing one, the British Biology Olympiad, (BBO) as that is in its fifteenth year since first starting as a committee of the former Institute of Biology.

BBO had a good year, with a further increase in the numbers taking part. The team that was eventually selected from a strong field at the finals last Easter consisted of two boys and two girls. The Award Ceremony in early July at Imperial College honoured some 90 medal winners who received their medals and prizes; additionally they and guests were treated to a splendid lecture given by the BBO President, Professor Steve Jones. The team then undertook some final training at Kew, Reading School and Reading University before flying out to Japan to compete in the IBO. Despite the tough competition from national Olympiad winners from over 50 countries, the members of the UK team acquitted themselves very well, winning one Gold and 3 silver medals, with one team member coming top overall in the Biochemistry practical. The results put UK at the top of all the European countries and the gold medallist was the highest scoring European competitor.

The other component of UKBC is Biology Challenge, which until recently had been run independently. That is still in its early days, as last year was the first national competition, the previous year having been a pilot event with a limited entry of 50 schools. However, it has made a splendid start attracting nearly 300 schools and some 25,000 individual competitors in its first full year. It clearly fills a need in schools, for a broadly based competition that extends the normal school biology curriculum by including topics such as natural history and is accessible to pupils of all abilities.

It was felt by the committee that there would be considerable advantages to be gained by running the two competitions together. So it was decided to form UK Biology Competitions as an umbrella organisation for administrative purposes covering the 2 present competitions and any others that might be formed in the future. The next step was for UKBC to become a Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Society of Biology. As a SIG, UKBC committee has the required autonomy to oversee the running of the competitions and to be accountable for related income and expenditure. The negotiations have taken some considerable time and so the new SIG has only been in existence for a matter of a very few weeks. Nevertheless, this year's BBO & BC competitions are well under way, being run as usual by the volunteer committees. The main round for BBO was held during the first week of February, using Optical Reader answer sheets scanned by the School of Biosciences, University of Birmingham. The BC tests were taken in mid-March and were conducted entirely on-line using the BBO website.

UKBC is grateful to its sponsors for help towards the website, team expenses to attend IBO, sending flyers to schools and other activities.

