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# No man is an island

by Freddie Theodoulou, Science Editor



Where to start? I confess that this column doesn't usually get written until just before the press deadline, but news gets old quickly these days. In light of the drama rapidly unfolding around the UK EU Referendum, most nights I've gone to bed wondering who would be running the country in the morning. Maybe we now have an answer

to that one: as I write, online news sites are breathlessly announcing that a removal van has arrived at No. 10 Downing Street. Although it's fair to say that the UK is still in a fairly bewildered state, and - it's easy to forget - still a member of the EU, thoughts are turning to what life will look like after Brexit.

Leaving the EU has far-reaching implications for science and this year's Parliamentary Links Day could not have been better timed, providing a forum for debate only four days after the vote. Minister of State for Universities and Science, Jo Johnson, talked about strategies to minimise the damage and move forward, making no mention of his brother Boris (at that stage, still hotly tipped to become Prime Minister - how times change!). Nicola Blackwood, former chair of the Science and Technology Select Committee confirmed the need to campaign for a sustained upward trajectory in Government R&D spending, concluding that "Britain is a science superpower and remains open for business". Whilst this was enthusiastically received, access to funding is only part of the story. Much was said about the invaluable contributions of overseas researchers, though Imran Khan, speaking for the British Science Association, reminded us that in this case, scientists are swimming against the tide of public opinion. Freedom of movement, valued as essential for a vibrant scientific community, is what some Brexiteers voted to curtail.

British science cannot thrive in isolation. Science is an international activity, sustained and enlivened by networks of researchers both within and beyond Europe. Whilst bureaucratically cumbersome, the EU has been a major instrument for promoting these networks. In this context, Donne's words, though written as meditation on sickness and death, seem particularly apt:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee<sup>1</sup>.

Indeed, I am grieving about Brexit but what can we do? Talk to the public, promote inclusion, tolerance and diversity as best we can and - my refuge always when politics get tough - take heart from the science that drives and enthuses us. If you'll permit me a slightly strained analogy, no cell is an island, either, and this issue looks Beyond the Cell, to understand, fascinate, build and heal. ■

1. John Donne (1623) Meditation XVII: Devotions upon Emergent Occasions

Following the EU referendum, the Biochemical Society wishes to represent and support our community. If you have been or expect to be affected by the changes, or have evidence of the challenges and opportunities for biochemistry and the wider biosciences, please share your experiences by writing to: [policy@biochemistry.org](mailto:policy@biochemistry.org)