

# BRITISH ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY



This is a living document adapted to meet the changing needs of the Society, our ecological community, and our wider society of publics.

BES Public Engagement Working Group – Draft 1.3 reviewed February 2021

## **BRITISH ECOLOGICAL SOCIETY PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

The British Ecological Society (BES) [Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023](#) outlines the Society's commitment to communicate the value of ecology with public audiences and support its members' to deliver impact (see Appendix A).

To support these overarching goals of the Society, the following Public Engagement Strategy has been developed. This strategy was created by BES Education & Engagement Staff and the BES Public Engagement Working Group (PEWG - composed of BES Members and invited partners) in collaboration with an independent evaluation consultant.

This public engagement strategy will be implemented through an annual BES public engagement programme which includes but is not limited to:

- Organizing events and activities communicating ecology with public audiences
- Providing training in public engagement and science communication practice
- Providing funding support for BES members to engage with public audiences
- Supporting and recognising ecologists' independent public engagement activities

### **OUR MISSION FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:**

The BES connects ecologists and publics, through dialogue, shared learning, and long-term engagement that promotes the excitement and relevance of ecological science.

### **OUR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIC AIMS:**

**AIM 1:** We will engage diverse public audiences with ecological science and careers

**AIM 2:** We will support ecologists to develop their careers and ability to deliver impact through public engagement

**AIM 3:** We will be inclusive, engaging with and supporting the diversity of our membership and ecological community

**AIM 4:** We will build partnerships to enhance the delivery of the Society's public engagement programme and the independent public engagement activity of its members'

**AIM 5:** We will support and enhance public engagement impact across BES departments

**AIM 6:** We will evaluate and review our impact and operation in public engagement

## OUR DEFINITION OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The British Ecological Society (BES) supports the definition of public engagement created by the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE):

*Public engagement describes the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education\* and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit.*

\*We expand this NCCPE definition to reflect the role of the BES in sharing the activity and benefits of ecological science, **inclusive of all ecological professions and academia.**

We note the following key elements:

1. There are a **'myriad of ways'** in which ecological science can be shared with publics
2. Engagement involves a **'two-way process'** of interaction and listening – this is the basis of quality learning experiences for both publics and ecologists
3. Activity must involve **'mutual benefit'** – it benefits the public audiences and ecologists

We view BES public engagement activities as falling along a spectrum of public audience engagement from delivery of information (one-way science communication) to participatory and ultimately collaborative two-way engagement. We may refer to such activities within the umbrella term 'public engagement'

<sup>[1]</sup>Deliver -> Inform -> Involve -> Co-create -> Empower.

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[1] <https://mhminsight.com/brain>.

## **AUDIENCE 1: OUR PUBLICS**

### **AIM 1: WE WILL ENGAGE DIVERSE PUBLIC AUDIENCES WITH ECOLOGICAL SCIENCE AND CAREERS**

#### **Messaging:**

**We will communicate the excitement and relevance of ecological science to fascinate, enthuse, and through education and awareness empower public audiences**

Communicate 'evidence-based messaging' for:

- (1) what ecology is and how nature works
- (2) ecological science as a solution to local and global challenges
- (3) how individuals can take action to benefit the environment, themselves, and society

Raise awareness of 'ecological careers':

- (1) by demonstrating their relevance and importance
- (2) showcasing their breadth and diversity
- (3) show that anybody can become an ecologist

#### **Target audiences (see Appendix B):**

**We will engage a wide range of audiences, but focus our activities on reaching our priority public groups:**

- (1) 'Diverse' – covering the breath of backgrounds, perspectives, expertise and knowledge
- (2) 'Underrepresented' - groups underrepresented in ecological careers
- (3) 'Next Generation' - future ecologists and BES members

#### **Accessibility:**

**We will provide opportunities for 'lifelong learning' through content and experiences that are inclusive and accessible to all:**

People of all ages, physical, learning, and social needs will be able to participate and benefit

#### **Platforms:**

**We will use a diverse range of platforms to best reach and engage with our public audiences in innovative, creative and impactful ways**

Including both digital and physical platforms and materials e.g. commercial and community events, social media and digital streaming, printed resources and interactive activities

## **AUDIENCE 2: OUR ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITY**

### **AIM 2: WE WILL SUPPORT ECOLOGISTS TO DEVELOP THEIR CAREER AND ABILITY TO DELIVER IMPACT THROUGH PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

**We will provide opportunities for ecologists to conduct public engagement primarily through:**

- (1) Events – directly reach and engage with public audiences, and develop skills and experience e.g. in activity design, co-creation, communication, event management
- (2) Training – events and resources to develop confidence and skills
- (3) Funding – support for independent development and public engagement activities
- (4) Additional support – e.g. access to communications and promotion platforms, networking opportunities, materials and activities

**We will provide recognition for ecologists' participation in public engagement:**

Ecologists' expertise and work be a central feature of our public engagement content  
All contributors to BES public engagement activities will be recognised and rewarded  
Our members independent public engagement activity will be promoted and celebrated

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### **AIM 3: WE WILL BE INCLUSIVE, ENGAGING WITH AND SUPPORTING THE DIVERSITY OF OUR MEMBERSHIP AND ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITY**

**We will attract and retain members:**

Our public engagement programme will be a valuable membership benefit, with members benefiting from exclusive opportunities or priority access to support

A focus will be on providing support for early career ecologists and those new to public engagement

We will inform participants of and encourage engagement with activities of other BES departments

**We will be inclusive and representative:**

We will involve and support ecologists of all disciplines and career stages, enhancing our relevance to and engagement with practitioners and academics

We will reach and engage with members and ecologists of all backgrounds, geographically, demographically, financially, and accessibility needs

## **AUDIENCE 3: OUR PARTNERS**

### **AIM 4: WE WILL BUILD PARTNERSHIPS TO ENHANCE THE DELIVERY OF THE SOCIETY'S PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME AND THE INDEPENDENT PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY OF ITS MEMBERS**

**We will form partnerships that enable us to:**

Enhance our ability to reach and engage with our target public audiences

Acquire funding and funding in kind to increase the scale and quality of our activities

Utilise external expertise to develop our activities, enhance our skills, and support BES staff and members

Raise the profile and reputation of the BES as a Society that: advances ecology; provides high quality public engagement; supports ecologists; benefits the natural world and society

**We will provide value to partners, including:**

Access to ecologists and their expertise for supporting public engagement activities

Our capacity and ability to develop and deliver quality public engagement activities

Our capacity and ability to provide training and share best practice in public engagement

Our communications platforms to reach a focused ecological audience and wider networks

## **AUDIENCE 4: OUR SOCIETY**

### **AIM 5: WE WILL SUPPORT AND ENHANCE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IMPACT ACROSS BES DEPARTMENTS**

**We will utilise the initiatives and resources produced across BES departments to enhance delivery of our public engagement aims**

Share opportunities and resources in particular with the BES Education and Careers Committee member support and schools outreach programmes where our impact aims overlap

Enhancing public awareness and understanding of the Society's wider work furthering ecological science and policy work

**We will support the public engagement activities of other BES departments where collaboration supports the aims of the public engagement programme**

Through BES Education and Engagement Staff capacity and expertise, and consultation of Public Engagement Working Group expertise where appropriate

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### **AIM 6: WE WILL EVALUATE AND REVIEW OUR IMPACT AND OPERATION IN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**

**We will use evaluation frameworks to build understanding of our impact against our Public Engagement Strategic Aims**

Aim 1: To understand the outcomes of participating in our events and activities for our public audiences

Aim 1: To understand the audiences participating in our events and activities to ensure we are engaging with our target public audiences

Aim 2: To understand and improve how we support ecologists to develop their careers and ability to deliver impact through public engagement

Aim 3: To ensure our public engagement programme is inclusive and supports the diversity of our members and the ecological community

Aim 4: To understand the contribution of our partnerships – on public audiences, our members, our partners, and the BES

Aim 5: To demonstrate and provide joined up understanding of public engagement impact across BES departments

**We will centralise impact reporting of public engagement activities conducted across BES departments where they deliver on our strategic aims**

## **APPENDIX A: ABOUT THE BES AND SUPPORTING THE GOALS OF THE BES STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 – 2023:**

The [British Ecological Society](#) is the biggest scientific society for ecologists in Europe with a membership of 6,000 in 125 countries around the world. We support the ecology community at all stages of their careers through our [journals](#), [meetings](#), [grants](#), and [education](#) and [policy](#) work. The first ecology society to be established anywhere in the world, we have been the champion of ecology for more than a century.

### **BES Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023 – Goals relevant to our Public Engagement Strategy Aims:**

Our Public Engagement work will support the wider [BES Strategic Plan](#), sets out how we will work towards our vision in which nature and people thrive in a world inspired by ecology.

BES Strategic Goal	Sub-Goal	Related Public Engagement Aim
<b>1: Advance and promote ecological science and its applications:</b> We will support new ideas, make connections and increase the impact of ecological science. We will be the best place for the ecological community to publish, meet and discuss their work.	1.4: Provide a suite of grants, responsive to the ecology community's needs	<b>Aim 2 + Aim 5:</b> 'Funding' + 'BES departments'
<b>2: Raise the profile of ecology to make a difference:</b> We will be the 'go-to' evidence based voice for ecology and our environment, working with our members, decision makers and public groups to apply ecological science expertise to solving societal challenges. We will excite, fascinate and enthuse.	2.1 Engage with diverse public groups, business, policy and decision makers  2.2 Help ecologists have impact through their research and improve knowledge exchange  2.3 Push clear, evidence-based messages from a range of public and specialist Platforms  2.4 Reach out to the next generation	<b>Aim 1 + Aim 5:</b> 'Target audiences' + 'BES departments'  <b>Aim 2:</b> 'opportunities'  <b>Aim 1:</b> 'Messaging', 'Platforms'  <b>Aim 1 + Aim 2:</b> 'Target audiences' + 'Attract and retain members'
<b>3: Foster a strong and diverse ecological community:</b> We will empower and enable a vibrant and influential global community of ecologists. Everyone interested in ecology will be valued, wherever and whoever they are.	3.1 Support ecologists to pursue and achieve their career ambitions throughout their whole career  3.2 Help people nurture their inner ecologist through life-long learning  3.4 Attract new members, and retain current members – anywhere and everywhere	<b>Aim 2:</b> 'opportunities'  <b>Aim 1 + Aim 2:</b> 'Target audiences', 'Platforms + 'opportunities', 'inclusive'  <b>Aim 2 + Aim 4:</b> 'opportunities', 'inclusive' + 'partnerships'



## **APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

To enable clarity in impact planning and evaluation in relation to our BES Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023, we provide the following definitions.

<b>Diverse</b>	<p>(a) covering the breath of backgrounds, perspectives, expertise and knowledge</p> <p>(b) Ensuring we do not serve the same audience repeatedly (without strategic and opportunistic reasoning), being flexible in our target audience as needs and priority target audiences change.</p>
<b>Underrepresented</b>	<p>Groups with lower than average representation within ecology careers. This can refer to local scales within the UK and international scales, including geographic, socio-economic, ethnic, or other backgrounds.</p> <p>(a) Demonstrating a commitment to regularly engaging with audiences ‘not being reached and engaged with by others within the environmental sciences and of low science/environmental capital, whilst</p>
<b>Next generation</b>	<p>Those who will be the next professional ecologists/ BES members. This does not refer to specific ages, just those who are not currently employed professionals in ecology or actively practicing amateur ecologists. This definition may also justify reaching audiences of higher science capital and active engagement with pursuing ecological education, careers, or actioning ecological science.</p>
<b>Early Career Ecologist / Researcher</b>	<p>Typically defined as those in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Within academia: between graduate level study (Masters or PhD level studentships), early postdoctoral positions, and a first independent research position or fellowship, though this definition can vary in context</li> <li>(b) Practitioners and professionals: within a traineeship, entry level positions, or before mid-management levels, though this definition can vary in context.</li> </ul>