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Submission  
to the Royal  
Society of  
Biology's 'Voice  
of the Future'  
2026 event

# SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF BIOLOGY'S 'VOICE OF THE FUTURE' 2026 EVENT

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## Contributors:

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1. This winter has shown how quickly influenza can push the NHS towards critical strain. NHS England reported that, in early December 2025, an average of 2,660 patients a day were in hospital with flu, the highest ever for that point in the season. UKHSA surveillance also showed sharply rising influenza positivity in early December 2025, with particularly high rates among school-aged children. Independent analyses have highlighted that influenza admission rates are projected to peak far higher this year than in 2023/24, illustrating how volatile and severe these seasons can be. Given that the UK has experienced some of the highest flu-related hospitalisations in recent years, what concrete measures is the Government taking to protect public safety this winter, including vaccination uptake, early access to treatment, and NHS surge capacity, and how will success be transparently measured?
2. My lab's research at Cambridge focuses on the impact of environmental exposures like pollutants, plastics, and drugs on the gut microbiome. Our research, as well as research from countless labs around the world, has established the gut microbiome as a key driver of human health across all organ systems. With the gut microbiome now recognised as a major determinant of long-term health and diet its most powerful modifiable driver, how will the Government actively support and incentivise healthier eating, particularly for children and lower-income communities, beyond issuing dietary guidance alone?
3. We are watching major turbulence in the United States, where health policy, research priorities, and vaccine governance have become entangled with misinformation dynamics in ways that are already affecting funding and public confidence. The UK is not insulated on this issue. Communities in this country see the same streams of content. And when people lose trust in vaccines, antibiotics stewardship, outbreak guidance, or food safety science, the consequences are immediate: lower uptake, later presentation, more severe disease, and higher system costs. Considering growing science and health misinformation internationally, particularly in microbiology and infectious diseases, what is the UK Government's strategy to safeguard public trust in science, protect evidence-based policy-making, and counter misinformation before it undermines public health and research capacity?