

Meeting reports

Biochemical Society meetings: several years in review!



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It has been some years since the Honorary Meetings Secretary has contributed an article to the *Biochemist* (February 2004 from Professor Brian Beechey), for which I must apologize.

In this short report, I will review the past successes and future directions of the Biochemical Society meetings programme, emphasizing the dynamic nature of scientific meetings and welcoming suggestions and input from Biochemical Society members.

First, though, I thank the many people involved, without whose input and expertise there would be no Biochemical Society meetings at all! Over the last few years, Brian Beechey has contributed a huge amount of time and energy to ensure that the meetings structure of the Biochemical Society was reshaped to meet the changing demands of the scientific community. I will take this opportunity to thank him both personally and on behalf of the Society and its members.

The present Biochemical Society meetings programme, organized through the sterling efforts of the Meetings Board and the seven associated Theme Panels, is delivered through Harden conferences, Annual Symposia, Focused Meetings and Independent Meetings, thereby providing a mechanism for the communication of a variety of biochemistry-related topics that are relevant to the research community as a whole.

The scientific content covered at these meetings (excluding the Harden Conferences) is reported in the form of mini-reviews in the journal *Biochemical Society Transactions*, which, under the Honorary Editorship of David Richardson, has seen significant numbers of web-based downloads of published manuscripts (approaching 1 million per year), together with an increase in the Impact Factor to 3.447, which is the highest ever. Special thanks are deserved by all the staff involved with the production and publication of *Biochemical*

Society Transactions at Portland Press. It is important that members of the Society are aware that subscriptions to *Biochemical Society Transactions* provide significant income to the Biochemical Society and is thus able to directly feed back into the meetings programme.

Finally, I particularly acknowledge and thank the staff of the Biochemical Society Meetings Office, whose expertise and hard work ensures that high-quality meetings are delivered with great professionalism... and within budget!

In 2004, in addition to the programme of Focused Meetings (for which I was the Meetings Co-ordinator), the Society held a single high-profile meeting called 'BioScience2004 — from molecules to organisms' at the SECC in Glasgow in July. The scientific organizers of this meeting (chaired by Professor Robin Irvine) put together an outstanding programme of scientific speakers that focused on selected areas of biochemical research aiming to provide a molecular explanation and understanding of a range of biological phenomena important in health and disease, a goal which could succinctly summarize one of the key aims of the Biochemical Society. This meeting was attended by over 1200 delegates, with more than 500 poster presentations being made. The keynote speakers included Roger Tsien, setting the scene with a lecture entitled 'Breeding molecules to spy on cells'. Scientific excellence from overseas from Graham Warren and Tony Pawson was matched from the UK by talks from Peter Parker, David Lane, Karen Vousden, Chris Dobson and Steve O'Rahilly. A satellite meeting, 'GPCR Allosterism and Accessory Proteins: New Insights into Drug Discovery', held at Organon was well attended and considered to be a great success.

In 2005, 'BioScience2005 — from genes to systems', the second of the main meetings to be held in Glasgow, aimed to build on the success of the 2004 meeting. BioScience2005 provided another



BioScience2006



The Biochemical Society Meetings Office Team

excellent scientific programme, which complemented notable keynote lectures (Robert Lefkowitz, Matthias Mann, Wolfgang Baumeister, Alan Hall, Leslie Dutton, David Stuart and Walter Kolch) with an equally impressive line-up of speakers for individual colloquia. Topics covered included the nucleus and gene expression, protein structure, stem-cell biology and development. BioScience2005 also provided an opportunity for additional sessions covering careers (CV clinics and 'speed data' sessions) and a 'Science in Society' colloquium. However, overall, attendance at the meeting was disappointing, with fewer than 500 paying delegates, similar to the numbers attending 'old-style' main meetings in days gone by.

'BioScience2006 — bioscience for the 21st century' was organized together with a memorable one-day meeting to celebrate the *Biochemical Journal* Centenary: 'Literature, Legacy, Life... Biochemistry for the 21st Century'. As with BioScience2005, overall feedback from delegates attending this meeting was excellent. An impressive array of speakers covered topics from the molecular basis of transcription, ion channels, nuclear receptors, information processing and molecular signalling to the mechanisms underlying the control of cellular process and the regulation of immunity. Such a programme might have been predicted to excite and enthuse potential conference attendees; however, similar numbers of paying delegates registered for this meeting as had done in 2005. It was becoming apparent that this format of meeting, covering a broad spectrum of research topics, might not be the most attractive to Society members or other potential delegates as pressures on resources and time are increasing.

The Society was committed to a further main meeting to be held in Glasgow in July 2007. Largely thanks to the efforts of Brian Beechey (Biochemical Society), Steven Hill (Pharmacological Society) and David Beech (Physiological Society), a unique event titled 'Life Sciences 2007' was conceived, bringing together three major societies at a single venue for the first time. This meeting had a definite buzz about it, and lessons learned in previous years

relating to the organization of posters and the trade exhibition improved the opportunities for networking. Life Sciences 2007 was attended by 970 delegates and had 60 scientific sessions, all jointly organized by the three societies, including more than 150 oral communications and nearly 600 posters. Life Sciences 2007 also included a careers day for PhD students and postdoctoral fellows and was preceded by a very successful Young Life Scientists Symposium organized entirely by young researchers. Similarly to previous years, delegates attending Life Sciences 2007 gave overwhelmingly positive feedback – even demanding that the meeting be re-run the following year! However, although delegate numbers were much higher than in 2005/6, they remained short of predictions/expectations.

As in previous years, in 2007 the Biochemical Society organized a total of 46 full days of scientific colloquia. In addition to Life Sciences 2007, this programme of science was delivered through a variety of meeting formats, comprising ten Focused Meetings, two Harden Conferences and the Society's Annual Symposium in Manchester.

In total, 2037 delegates attended meetings in 2007, compared with 1385 in 2006. The Harden Conferences remain successful, with a full residential format and no commitment to publication of the proceedings – ensuring that delegates can interact and discuss the latest scientific developments in an informal way (and usually in very pleasant surroundings!). In 2007, 'Mitochondrial physiology' was held in Ambleside, UK, with 104 delegates and 'Protein folding and assembly *in vitro* and *in vivo*' was also held in Ambleside, with 96 delegates. Median attendance at Focused Meetings was 83 delegates compared with 69 in 2006, but it remains difficult to predict which meetings will attract large numbers of delegates. Although high delegate numbers are an indicator of success, I believe it is important that the meetings programme provides flexibility to support meetings in emerging areas of research that may attract a more restricted number of attendees.

The Society also supported eight Independent Meetings in 2007 with marketing and Student Travel Grants. In recognition of the contribution that Independent Meetings play in promoting the communication of biochemistry, the Meetings Board has recently decided to allocate a significant proportion of the budget to provide a financial contribution towards support of Independent Meetings. It is my hope that Biochemical Society Meetings have been successful in terms of presentation of a diverse programme of biochemistry-related topics, delegate numbers and provision of material for publication in *Biochemical Society Transactions*. In particular, I am convinced that providing opportunities for PhD students and early-career postdoctoral fellows to present their work at a meeting of international scientists represents an important contribution that the Biochemical Society can make to the scientific community. I firmly believe that maximizing opportunities for delegates to exchange ideas and communicate the latest exciting developments requires that we continue to examine new ways of delivering meetings.

One of the financial implications of the Biochemical Society hosting the BioScience series of meetings was that, without



Poster session at the Tenerife joint INPROTEOLYS meeting

dramatically increased numbers of participants, this meeting would consume most of the meetings budget. In contrast, the largely successful Focused Meetings, which essentially run on a cash-neutral basis, attract around 1000 delegates over the year. At a review of the meetings strategy held in January 2006, it was decided that holding such a high-profile event was unlikely to be sustainable and to consider alternative ways of delivering a programme of scientific meetings to communicate biochemical research. At Manchester in March 2008, the Society organized 'Linked' Focused Meetings with parallel symposia and joint plenary lectures to provide an opportunity to bring together research communities involved in transcription and post-transcriptional events. This experiment will be repeated in 2009 with the 100th Focused Meeting entitled 'Systems Biology'.

Historically, the Biochemical Society has organized meetings jointly with a number of other learned societies, and the Meetings Board is actively seeking to develop further links in the future. This year sees a series of joint workshops being organized on techniques for molecular analysis following productive discussions with the Royal Society of Chemistry. The Society also held our first Focused Meeting in Europe in a unique experiment in collaboration with the Spanish INPROTEOLYS network. We are still trying to determine whether the location of Tenerife helped to make this meeting attractive to delegates! In April 2009, we will work together with the British Society for Cell Biology to organize what I hope will be a fantastic meeting entitled 'The Dynamic Cell'. In addition, we are in the preliminary stages of organizing another (albeit smaller scale) meeting in 2010 jointly with the Physiological Society and the British Pharmacological Society.

The year 2011 marks the centenary of the Biochemical Society, and it is likely that the Meetings Office team will have a significant role to play in the celebrations, including preliminary plans to organize a meeting jointly with the Chinese Biochemical Society.

Although the meetings programme of the Society continues to evolve, largely as a result of the hard work of all those mentioned above, we are now seeking to canvass the opinions of the research community (via a survey this Autumn) as to what factors make a meeting attractive to potential delegates. Your input is crucial! ■

Biochemical Society Travel Grants

Application Guidelines and Information

The rules and regulations for applying for a Travel Grant can be viewed in full at www.biochemistry.org, where you can also apply. The main points are:

1. The Travel Grants Committee meets six times a year with closing dates for applications of 1st January, 1st March, 1st May, 1st June, 1st September and 1st November. Applications received after these closing dates will not be considered. Furthermore, applications should be for meetings or visits which take place at least one month after a particular closing date.
2. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that the most cost-effective form of transport and accommodation is to be utilized.
3. New members may apply for their first Travel Grant after they have been a member of the Biochemical Society for 1 year by the relevant closing date, although applicants will not be eligible if they have been awarded a Student Travel Grant within the last year or a General Travel Grant from the Society during the previous 2 years.
4. Meetings for which grants are sought must have a substantial biochemical content and the applicant must give evidence of active participation in the meeting (e.g., abstract of presentation).
5. Travel grants can be used for travel to attend scientific meetings or for short visits to other laboratories.
6. PhD students in their third or fourth years can apply to the fund.
7. Credit will be given to 'relevant publications' (preferably refereed) which are cited in support of the application.

Visiting Biochemist Bursaries

Three substantial grants are now available to provide the exchange of research within scientifically developing parts of the world. These grants will be available to enable a member (the sponsor) to support an overseas researcher on a laboratory visit to the sponsor's research facility or to enable the member to go out to visit a research facility in a developing region. The maximum award will be £2,000 per grant. Closing dates for Visiting Biochemist Bursaries are 1st March and 1st September.