

SCOTTISH CONSORTIUM FOR RURAL RESEARCH

The 115th meeting of the SCRR Executive Committee was held at
Scottish Natural Heritage, Silvan House, 3rd Floor East,
231 Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh, EH12 7AT
on Monday 11th March 2013

Present:

Steve Yearley	(Chairman)
Stuart Monro	(Scientific Director)
Ruth Wolstenholme	
Ian Bainbridge	
Willie Donachie	
Alastair A Macdonald	(Secretary/Treasurer)

1. Welcome & Apologies

Apologies were received from Nick Fraser, Martin Price, Gordon Machray, Colin Campbell and Jeremy Bradshaw.

2. Minutes of 114th executive meeting

Accepted as accurate.

**3. Centres of Excellence and Networks: update on all networks
Sniffer**

Ruth Wolstenholme reported that work with communities has been a recent focus including a pilot project with communities: "Are You Ready? – talking about the weather".

<http://www.adaptationscotland.org.uk/5/116/0/Are-you-ready.aspx> and a blog is available:

<http://areyoureadyscotland.wordpress.com/>

Sniffer's work on 'community resilience mapping' has seen a number of community group members, including farmers, involved with 77 people at the first event at the Carse of Gowrie,. The expansion of community adaptation initiatives nation-wide will be informed by the results of a number of pilot projects.

Ian Bainbridge raised the wider benefits of community involvement in 'volunteer data collection' with which a number of agencies such as SNH, SEPA, Forestry Scotland have been active for some years; they have small teams working on so-called 'Citizen Science' topics – e.g. bird watching, insect data gathering, monitoring local flood risk. It is one way of expanding science into the community, giving purpose to local observation and recording, and collecting data on the environment that could not be gathered

economically in any other way. Various learned as well as amateur societies, such as the Botanical Society, Mycological Society, etc. can feed observations into a larger information database. The general availability of new communication technology and sites like Wikipedia has helped promote communication of locally gathered scientific information. It raises issues of connectivity. This may be an area worthy of a future SCRR seminar to share knowledge of how to encourage well-structured data-collection and other practice.

Action SKM

James Hutton Institute

No report, probably due to the tragic accident reported this morning.

Moredun

A new research area has been set up – Aquaculture Research. Initially this will be a five-year program together with the Inverness-based company Fish Vet Group, a ‘Benchmark consultancy’. They will be looking at disease prevention in farmed fish with the ultimate aim of producing vaccines and pharmaceuticals. It would be very beneficial to Scotland if the research can be carried through to manufacture of these products. Scotland is well served by a number of institutes with an interest in fish biology and farming.

As with other institutes the impact of government cuts in funding will continue for several more years.

CAMERAS

Ian Bainbridge indicated that there was not much more to report. Five seminars of CAMERAS’ members are currently being organised to look at the main driver areas of strategy. It may be becoming more ‘issues-led’. It was felt that the CAMERAS Board might not meet until June or July.

School of Social and Political Sciences

Steve Yearley noted that there was not much more to report. An MSc programme called SATIS (Science and Technology in Society) has been set up. Five funded studentships from the SFC have been made available for that MSc course. Stuart Monro asked if there was anything being done on-line. He drew attention to MOOCs which are Massive Open Online Courses that the University of Edinburgh is offering in a number of fields. These include equine nutrition, critical thinking in global challenges, and an introduction to philosophy (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/postgraduate/online-distance-learning/programmes/mooc-edinburgh>). Tens to hundreds of thousands are enrolled in these free courses. The feedback is very

positive. It is a way to get university education out to remote societies. Steve also commented positively about the many events that comprise the University of Edinburgh's 'innovative learning week' (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff-students/students/studies/innovative-learning>) which is held annually in February. He indicated that it might be a way in which SCRR can bring cross-disciplinary issues to the student body. Recent changes in international learning practices seem to be encouraging universities to tackle more innovative ways of interacting with and providing education to their students.

4 Events in 2012-2013

Stuart Monro reported that we had had the Environmental Tourism Workshop, which was a success. The Researching Scotland's Ruralities Workshop in March is 'sold out' with about 90 people expected. There are a number of suggested workshops including one on soils that are currently being discussed and Ian Bainbridge indicated that SNH would like to be involved in that one. Stuart indicated that the Environmental Web was a portal for more than just professional data, and would accept schools' data. There is a wide group interested in the soils and soil monitoring needs of Scotland. He also indicated that BGS were interested in doing something on the Clyde catchment. There is a demand for a further 'Tourism' workshop and an additional Workshop on Science Communication; this may be done in a different way. The participation of SAMs in the last one was important. The Cairngorm Research Workshop is due to be held in the summer. It is accepted that each one supplies information and research contacts that may be different from the following one, and so serves a different segment of the research community. The timing of all these need to be looked at carefully. Action SKM & AAM

Annual lecture 2014

Prof Ian Boyd, chief scientist at DEFRA, gave the annual lecture. His title was 'The evidential basis for food and environmental policy' and the talk went down exceedingly well. It was UK-based and critical. There were several ideas for the lecture in 2014: The importance of the EU; Scottish Science Policy; European Science Media Centres; European Rural Research Collaboration. It was agreed that it should be the right person who would give the right speech that would be stimulating to our membership.

Action SKM and SY (to identify speaker suggestion from EC)

Forum 2013

The Metagenomics forum in Battleby is at an advanced stage of planning. Due to unforeseen circumstances the date has been postponed to Wednesday 2nd October 2013 (previously set for 9th May 2013). There remain a few loose ends to be tied up. A

meeting will be held later in the month to take care of these.

Action SKM, AAM, WD & CC

Science Festival and Highland Show etc.

The SCRR Newsletter will be prepared in time to be distributed around various stands at the Highland Show. It has proved to be a cost-effective way of promoting SCRR. Action AAM

Directors' Lunches

Stuart indicated that a set of guidelines needs to be produced to send to the host institutes in advance of the Directors' Research Lunch that they would be hosting. Action SKM & AAM

It might be useful to the rest of the SCRR membership if there were abstract proceedings, in a conversational style, to highlight the talks etc. that followed the lunch. Action SKM & AAM

5 Membership

Steve Yearley indicated that he would be on research sabbatical for one year from August 2013 to July 2014. An approach had been made to Ian Bainbridge who has agreed to join the Executive Committee and be its interim chairman. The next meeting will be at the James Hutton Institute in Dundee on 19th August.

The Secretary placed on the table a paper listing the members of the Executive Committee who were due for re-appointment to the Executive Committee. The Scientific Director and the Secretary/Treasurer were reappointed for the year. The Secretary was asked to contact the others to find out their views about reappointment or replacement. It was decided that there should be further discussion about additional/alternative members to better represent the Institutes in the Consortium.

Action SY, SKM & AAM

Stuart Monro reported that he had been making approaches to St Andrews University to attract them back into the Consortium. There was a positive response and the financial issues need to be resolved. Action SKM

The University of Glasgow should be approached, perhaps by sowing seeds through the Veterinary School and the School of Life Sciences. Action WD & IB

Millport may become a non-member. It is currently run as a teaching station of the University of London. There are local issues as it is an important employer on the island. It needs significant capital investment.

6 **Finances**

The Secretary distributed the draft of a paper showing the membership of the Consortium split into five 'levels'. Level 1 represented the 'host' institution (U of E) and the number of Schools involved. Level 2 contained institutions with a very considerable involvement with Rural Research (SRUC, and JHI including BioSS). Level 3 members were important organisations in Scotland with large rural research interests (RBGE, BGS, Roslin, CEH, FR, Moredun, SASA, SNH, Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh Napier University). Level 4 members are important organisations in Scotland with somewhat smaller research teams (University of Stirling's Institute of Aquaculture, UHI, HWU, NMS, RSPB, Sniffer). Level 5 members represented the smallest research groups (e.g. UMBS, RZSS, Crichton Carbon Centre). He indicated that he was aware of the Executive Committee's wish that these be reduced to four levels, and pointed out that there might be an issue for some members in level 4 not being able to afford higher membership fees. He proposed for 2013/14, in line with policy previously established by the Main Board for small annual increases, that the Level 2-5 rates be increased by ~1%, i.e. to £1900, £950, £475 and £240 respectively, while the Level 1 rate remained at £10,000.

After discussion it was agreed that the Level 1 rate would remain at £10,000, Level 2 should be £1900, Level 3 be £950, and that Levels 4 and 5 be amalgamated. The amount for the new Level 4 might possibly be £350-400 and will be discussed with the relevant members. Action AAM

Following discussion it was suggested that Heriot-Watt University should move up to level 2 after exploration of greater engagement with the Consortium, and UHI should move up to level 3 (after exploration of ways of obtaining greater engagement with the Consortium – e.g. SAMS). It was also agreed that Stirling University could also move up to level 3 (after exploration of ways of obtaining greater engagement with the Consortium). The Secretary/Treasurer indicated that this would be helpful to the finances of the Consortium, as would the joining of large new institutes. Action SKM & AAM

7 **Contacts**

SSAC

No further information

8 **Publicity and Communications**

The Secretary reported that Stuart Monro and himself still have to find time to go to Damien to find out how to add material to the website. Action SKM & AAM

The minutes of Executive and Board meetings will probably go onto the 'Publications' part of the website under a separate subheading. Having an up-to-date listing of forthcoming events is being worked upon. It takes time to do. The layout of both website and Newsletter seems to be working well and attracting positive comment. The fact that the newsletter was in print as well as on the web was felt to be very useful. The web-based 'requests for further information' is not yet sorted. Damien Noonan and the Secretary will work on this to make sure it does not become unmanageable. Action AAM

The newsletter came out on time and carried a Natural Scotland theme. It is intended that elements of this theme will continue to be present in the next two issues. Copy for the next issue will be requested to arrive by 6th May so that it can be printed in time for the Highland Show. Tribute and thanks were paid to Damien Noonan for layout and to the institutional contributors for the high quality of their submissions.

9 **Residual matters from the minutes of the 114th meeting.**
None.

10 **Any other business.**
Ian Bainbridge reported that the second Scottish tree health summit had taken place recently. He indicated that there had been a lot of discussion about whether there should be a centre of expertise for plant health in Scotland. This would complement the already existing centres for 'Water', 'Animal Diseases' and 'Climate Exchange'. It would not be restricted to tree health, but would span plants in general, as there is disease transmission from trees to other plants.

The relative quiet of the summer was noted, and that there may be opportunities during the summer time for SCRR consortium members to demonstrate facilities or hold events of interest. This period will be considered. Action SKM

11 **Date and place of next meeting.**
Date and place of next meeting: - the Board meeting will be held at 13.00 on 6th May 2013 in the Raeburn Room, Old College. [The Directors' Research meeting at 10.30 and lunch at 12.30 will precede it.]