

SCOTTISH CONSORTIUM FOR RURAL RESEARCH

The 114th meeting of the SCRR Executive Committee was held at the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, 134 Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh, EH12 6TS
on Monday 21st January 2013

Present:

Steve Yearley	(Chairman)
Stuart Monro	(Scientific Director)
Gordon Machray	
Ruth Wolstenholme	
Nick Fraser	
Davina Wyper (for Colin Campbell, JHI)	
Alastair A Macdonald	(Secretary/Treasurer)

1. Welcome & Apologies

Apologies were received from Jeremy Bradshaw, Martin Price, Willie Donachie and Colin Campbell.

2. Minutes of 113th executive meeting

Accepted as accurate.

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

Ruth Wolstenholme drew particular attention to Sniffer working more on community engagement and strengthening citizen science where communities can map their own flood risk and other vulnerabilities. They are also making videos of communities' stories on how to adapt to climate change, harnessing and building on their interest and commitment. Sniffer is also working with Keep Scotland Beautiful (<http://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/>) and its Climate Challenge Fund (a total of £10.3 million of Climate Challenge Fund (CCF) grants is available each year until March 2015).

It was noted that Conservation Volunteers are also using the language of volunteering involvement (commonly referred to as Citizen Science).

James Hutton Institute

Davina Wyper reported that the Centre of Expertise for Waters (CREW) has launched a Scholars programme (<http://www.crew.ac.uk/news/call-applications-hydro-nation-scholars-programme>). Dates have now been set for three main industry practical events: Cereals in Practice on 2 July; Fruit for the Future on

18 July; and Potatoes in Practice on 8 August. It was recently announced that two members of staff, Prof Derek Stewart and Dr Eleanor Gilroy have joined the expert Plant Science Panel. This comprises staff members from leading research institutions and learned societies across the UK who make themselves available, as a one-stop-shop for plant science questions and comments from the general public. The panel will be available to tackle all sorts of plant science queries, whether it is about Ash Dieback disease, GM crops, bees and pesticides, mycotoxins in food or biofuels. Additionally, working together with the US company Eureka Genomics, a new low-cost custom assay for the genotyping of barley has been launched by JHI, that enables the identification of over 400 SNPs in a single test. This opens the door for new applications to other crops.

Stuart Monro reported that SSAC member, Dr John Brown (<http://www.scottishscience.org.uk/members/dr-john-brown-cbe-frse>), would be meeting the First Minister in February to lead on System Biology, which will include GM foods etc., and looking forward to new opportunities for Scotland in the future.

Moredun

No report.

CAMERAS

Gordon Machray indicated that there was very little to add to Ian Bainbridge's report to the main Board in December. Work continues on the Rural Affairs and Environment Strategy for Scotland. The contact person is Sarah Gledhill. There are some indications that a draft may be ready for presentation to the CAMERAS Board Meeting in March.

School of Social and Political Sciences

Steve Yearley reported that the Science, Technology and Innovation Studies (STIS) subject area has run its new Biotechnology, Innovation and Governance (BIG) Master's, which did well in recruiting students. They are now making the modules available to additional students. The Genomics Forum recently ran a seminar with Dr Peter W.E. Kearns, the head of the OECD's nanosafety programme. He is responsible for OECD's Working Party on Manufactured Nanomaterials and is also responsible for OECD's Programmes for biosafety, food safety and chemical accidents. They are examining the formulation of nanotechnology regulations and risk analyses. There will be further OECD meetings to try to identify test protocols and standards that may be recommended for Europe-wide application.

Staff from Edinburgh Napier University and Heriot-Watt University nanotech centres participated. Perhaps SCRR members should consider the environmental release impacts of nanotech. Teresa Fernandes, Professor of Environmental Sciences at Heriot-Watt University, has been examining how to test for nanotech

particles in the environment. Steve Yearley also mentioned Prof Vicki Stone, the Director of Nanosafety at Heriot-Watt University. The labs that do environmental testing do not have the years of experience testing for nanoparticles that labs like hers have. The necessary skills are not widespread. These are skills that the Institute of Occupational Medicine (IOM), Edinburgh Napier and Heriot-Watt Universities have. This may be of interest to the other members of the SCRR.

Action SKM

4 Events in 2012-2013

Directors' lunches 2013: new structure (see Appendix 1)

Stuart Monro opened a discussion of an approach designed to encourage greater engagement with SCRR from members, to provide attractive events that will justify travel and facilitate greater collaboration among the SCRR membership and beyond.

He indicated that the implications of the change of title from Edinburgh Consortium for Rural Research to Scottish Consortium for Rural Research demanded that we do things in a different way in order to ensure maximum engagement from the member organisations, regardless of physical location. At present the events providing opportunities for scientific engagement were;

1. Directors' lunches
2. Occasional seminars usually of half a day
3. A Forum as a full-day event, held every two years.

The Directors' lunches are an opportunity for the hosting organisation to present to the membership some of their current research. However, these events are comparatively short and may not represent sufficiently good value for Consortium representatives having to travel a significant distance. He suggested that in the future, Directors' lunches should be more substantial events, beginning with lunch but continuing well into the afternoon till, perhaps, 4pm. They should continue as at present to give the hosting organisation an opportunity to showcase some of their current research capabilities but should also be extended to demonstrate their collaboration with partners or expanded on a thematic basis, highlighting "big issues" that might be resolved by collaboration among the membership. The choice of approach must still remain with the hosting organisation. Perhaps the name should also be changed to 'Directors' research lunch' to signify the scientific content.

The occasional seminars are themed and usually occupy half a day though can be longer, perhaps starting mid-morning, and finishing around 4pm. They are driven by the members themselves and have been very successful. They offer the opportunity to engage

more widely, with presentations potentially coming from outside the membership as well as from within. However, there are difficulties in ensuring that they occur regularly given the heavy commitments of key people in the member organisations. Nevertheless, we have a few in mind, including BGS and the Clyde catchment area and the JHI and soils data, and possibly the environmental nanotech issue mentioned above. The hope would be that these seminars would stimulate greater collaboration in the future within areas of rural research.

The Forum is currently held every two years and is an opportunity to take part in a themed event, which often has wider interest than just among the Consortium membership or within Scotland. These have also been successful, especially when held in a central location. They encourage and facilitate collaboration between members of the Consortium.

Stuart Monro commented that the time is now appropriate to look at each of these types of event and re-cast them to better meet the needs of what is a more geographically distributed membership. At the same time it is an opportunity to re-affirm what each type of event is trying to achieve.

Steve Yearley asked if it would change the number of meetings in a year, from the new norm of four associated with Executive meetings and two Board meetings. That pattern would remain, with more content to the four. Ruth Wolstenholme was happy with the idea that 'big issues' would be aired and inform future seminars. Travel for potential new members in the west as well as current members from the north and east would be better attracted by this pattern of meetings.

Stuart Monro indicated that University Marine Biological Station, Millport is likely to be closing, and the implications of that might be that its Marine Science would be transferred to SAMS at Dunstaffnage (UHI). This, together with the Environmental Research work going on in Thurso represent hotspots of research at UHI in addition to Martin's work there, that are of interest to the Consortium. He suggested that they would almost certainly benefit from engagement with other member institutes.

Stuart Monro also indicated that he was keen to have the University of St Andrews return to the Consortium, mentioning the Schools of Biology and Geosciences in particular in this regard.

Gordon Machray suggested that if the Directors' meetings were going to be more 'meaty' then perhaps we should open them to more staff, perhaps two or three people from each institute. This would enrich the meetings. It would not over-stretch the catering as the number attending would probably remain within the potential number of 40-45 who are currently invited to come to

Directors' meetings; normally between 15 and 20 are able to attend at present.

Various topics have been aired as possible workshops including one from the BGS, and a rerun in 2014 of the Science Communication workshop held at Dynamic Earth in January of last year, which had proved to be popular and well attended.

The next Directors' lunch will be at SNH on March 11. As they have a lot of research collaborations, Stuart Monro indicated that he would be keen for SNH to initiate the new format of Directors' research lunch programmes. Action SKM

In response to a question from Davina Wyper, there was a brief discussion of the need for clarity and progress in the proposed Plant and Animal Diseases workshop, the suggested Rural Economics workshop, and the idea of a Geology workshop. Action DW

It was also suggested that there appeared to be a blurring of the distinction between workshops and the extended Directors' research lunches. The intention was that the latter would be strongly focused around the Institute hosting the event, whereas the workshops would be more thematic and involve a number of participants. Some topics could work as either, and this will require discussion with the host Institute as to which they wanted to run. Steve Yearley asked if there would be enough volunteer Institutes to hold the new type of Directors' research lunch. There is a need to organise the programme of the year in such a way that there is forewarning of what will happen at each meeting. The meeting on the 19 August will be at the JHI and this may be an opportunity to identify one of several possible suggested topics for either a workshop or a Directors' research lunch. Action DW, SKM & AAM

Steve pointed out that the previous Directors' lunches had sometimes been structured, as in the case of the visit to Napier University, where a wide range of interesting research topics were presented, and as such although not focused were still very valuable. It was agreed that it would be important to retain that portmanteau character if the host institute wished it. It was also important to keep the 'audience' of these meetings in mind; if too focused it may lead to institutes not sending Directors/representatives. Davina Wyper suggested that infrequent, higher quality meetings, sited with sensitivity to the geographic distribution of the Consortium Institutes, would attract busy research people more consistently. People will make more of an effort to attend if they are relatively infrequent.

Nick Fraser asked how many different workshops should be held in one year, given that we had reduced the number of Executive meetings to four per year. It was agreed that there would be consideration given to this question. Action SKM & AAM

Forum 2013

The Metagenomics forum in Battleby is at an advanced stage of planning with the date set for 9th May 2013. Details of speakers remain to be clarified. Action WD & CC

Annual lecture 2013

Prof Ian Boyd, chief scientist at DEFRA, will give the annual lecture at 6pm on Thursday 21 February. The title is 'The evidential basis for food and environmental policy'. Sir John Arbuthnott will chair the meeting and Jeremy Bradshaw will give the vote of thanks. The advertising for the talk is on the SCRR website, and we aim to produce the SCRR Newsletter in time for the lecture.

Stuart Monro reported that he had been in touch with Professor Louise Heathwaite, the Chief Scientific Adviser, Rural and Environment, to the Scottish Government, and that she had indicated that she had SCRR 'on her radar'. He has arranged to meet her to discuss the relationship between her office and what is done in SCRR. Action SKM

Steve Yearley spoke about the workshop 'Researching Scotland's rurality: social-science perspectives on current issues in rural Scotland' that will be held on the 20th March at Perth Concert Hall starting at 10.00 and running until 16.00. The programme has been finalised, and invitations would go out on the 31st January. Advertising and promotion of the event is in hand. He expressed regret that the two people he had invited from the Crichton Campus to come to the 'Researching Scotland's rurality' workshop were unable to come because of individual reasons such as conflicting seminars.

Science Festival and Highland Show etc.

Stuart Monro indicated that the most sensible approach was to distribute the SCRR Newsletter around the Science Festival and to various stands at the Highland Show. It has proved to be a useful way of promoting SCRR without having high costs. Action AAM

5 Membership

The committee discussed the position of its Chairman for the year that Steve Yearley will be on sabbatical. An approach will be made to Ian Bainbridge to join the Executive Committee and be its interim chair. Action SY

6 Consortium membership and fee structure 2013-14

The Secretary distributed the draft of a paper derived from one previously presented by Mike Talbot for the Edinburgh Consortium. The members had been split into five 'levels', designed to broadly reflect: a) the role that the institution plays in SCRR affairs; b) the size of the institution; c) the distance from Edinburgh. Level 1 represented the 'host' institution (U of E) and the number of Schools involved. Level 2 contained institutions with a major

involvement with Rural Research (e.g. SRUC). Level 3 members were major organisations in Scotland (e.g. RBGE, Roslin, CEH, FR, Moredun). Level 4 members include research groups within HEIs (e.g. HWU, ENU, IoA), large organisations based some distance from Edinburgh (e.g. UHI), small research teams in Edinburgh (e.g. BioSS, NMS, RSPB, Sniffer). Level 5 members were small research groups (e.g. UMBS, RZSS, Crichton Carbon Centre).

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. He also suggested that the James Hutton Institute and Heriot-Watt University should move up to level 2 (the latter after exploration of greater engagement with the Consortium), and UHI move up to level 3 (after exploration of ways of obtaining greater engagement with the Consortium – e.g. SAMS).

During discussion Stuart Monro indicated that the current structure of the Consortium had evolved, and will continue to evolve. It was agreed that the distance from Edinburgh was no longer a relevant factor. It seemed to make good sense for JHI to join SRUK in the second level. St Andrews should also come into the second or third band. The University of Glasgow has several schools, which would be relevant to the Consortium, including the Schools of Interdisciplinary Studies (at the Crichton Centre), Veterinary Medicine and Geographical and Earth Sciences. There was a question about what other parts of University of Stirling would be of interest to, and might be interested in the Consortium (e.g. Social Policy, Environmental Science). Copies of last year's SCRR Newsletters were distributed to members of the Executive to send out to colleagues in different relevant Schools in Universities. There was discussion of the difficulty in establishing the relative scale of contribution to 'Rural Research' and the fees that the Consortium might charge. In the past the scaling was based on the rough size of the organisation and a rough estimate of the involvement in Rural Science. There is no difference in 'service' according to fee charged. Those organisations that can, do contribute more in fees to the Consortium. The point was made that Universities such as St Andrews, Dundee, Glasgow, Glasgow Caledonian, still have to come into the Consortium – what will they be charged? The potential size of the Consortium could be about 35 institutions, bearing in mind the recent amalgamation of institutions, the number of universities and the possibility of about five 'other' organisations, which have as yet not been identified. It was estimated that this could lead to an approximate doubling of the 'rural research' represented in the Consortium.

It was agreed that any 'Edinburgh-centric' aspect had to be removed, and that 'level 4' may be redundant. The paper will be

redrafted to take into account the comments made in the discussion. Action SKM & AAM

7 **Contacts**

SSAC

Stuart Monro reported that he had obtained some information from the SSAC website (<http://www.scottishscience.org.uk/>). The update report found there is a useful document. There are currently two active SSAC work programs. The first is 'Education'. Following the publication of Science Education: Enhancing Support for Schools Through Collaboration earlier in the year, the SSAC has been working with key stakeholders, to create an Industry/Academic Schools Liaison Coordinator for Sciences post. An Education Support Officer - Higher Education and Industry Links - has been advertised and interviews held. The post will be based at, and managed by, SSERC. The selected candidate will take up post in 2013. The second program is 'Innovation' and the report on that is due for publication. Other work includes highlighting key science and engineering developments that may have a significant future impact for Scotland. The SSAC are continuing to work on 'Science Hot Topics' and have prioritized two areas - Synthetic Biology and Food Security - as ones which require some further attention over the next few months.

He indicated that they were also looking at the National Data Linkage Centre (NDLC). They have also recently published a paper 'Some Consequences of Open Access Publishing' which sets out some potentially detrimental transitional effects and disadvantages related to Open Access Publishing. A copy of the paper can be found at:

<http://www.scottishscience.org.uk/article/open-access>

He indicated that keeping an eye on the SSAC website may be the best way of being aware of what is going on there. During discussion anxiety was again expressed about the loss of the ambassadorial role once performed by regular and close contact with the wider world of Scottish Science.

8 **Publicity and Communications**

A request has gone out to all member organisations requesting material for the next issue of the SCRR Newsletter, if possible on research that assists the Natural Scotland theme. Material from outside the Consortium may be brought into future issues of the Newsletter when it looks like it may be of importance to a number of current members and may encourage expansion of Consortium membership.

9 **Residual matters from the minutes of the 113th meeting.**

None.

10 **Any other business.**

Steve Yearley indicated that the Genomics Forum has a programme of 'Bright Ideas Fellows'. Currently the Forum has the Education Officer from Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Naomi Webster as one of

these. She has been working with a group of young people – aged between 9 and 12, from the Muirhouse, Pilton and Granton areas of Edinburgh, helping them to learn about the importance of conserving endangered species and habitats. The project – which is unique in its involvement of the Genomics Forum, the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, the Lyceum Youth Theatre Discover Programme, and North Edinburgh Arts will culminate with the young people informing their local communities about conservation issues, through the performance - on Saturday 26 January - of a pantomime they have developed with the support of the North Edinburgh Arts Centre. The children will also undertake a “behind the scenes” visit to Edinburgh Zoo as part of the project, in order to learn about endangered animals first hand.

Ruth Wolstenholme reported a collaboration between Sniffer, Cifal Scotland, Scottish Wildlife, Scottish Business in the Community and various other organisations) to consider sustainable development goals.

The Secretary reported that the University of Edinburgh had just put up onto the web 100 ‘Research in a Nutshell’ videos of its scientists: (<http://homepages.inf.ed.ac.uk/srodnes/RVID/>). Each one lasts one minute. It is an attractive and very unusual art form giving an extraordinary glimpse into the research of the University. Gordon Machray Machray indicated that Dynamic Earth has a similarly attractive piece of film of young astronomers that carries a very nice message. The view was expressed that other institutions might do similar things on their websites. Steve Yearley indicated that it had been very simply done by one (skilled) person with a digital SLR camera.

11 Date and place of next meeting.

Date and place of next meeting: - Executive meeting on 11th March 2013 in SNH, Silvan House, 3rd Floor East, 231 Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh, EH12 7AT.

Appendix 1

Models for scientific events

The implications of the change of title from Edinburgh Consortium for Rural Research to Scottish Consortium for Rural Research also demands that we do things in a different way in order to ensure maximum engagement from the member organisations, regardless of physical location. At present events providing opportunities for scientific engagement are;

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The time is now appropriate to look at each of these types of event and re-cast them to better meet the needs of what is now a more geographically scattered membership. At the same time we can re-affirm what each type of event is trying to achieve.

Directors' lunches:

In the future, Directors' lunches should be more substantial events, beginning with lunch but continuing well into the afternoon till, perhaps, 4pm. They should continue as at present to give the hosting organisation an opportunity to showcase some of their current research capabilities but should also be extended to demonstrate their collaboration with partners or expanded on a thematic basis, highlighting "big issues" that might be resolved by collaboration among the membership. The choice of approach must still remain with the hosting organisation.

Occasional seminars:

These could be rather longer events, perhaps starting mid-morning, finishing around 4pm and would usually be around a specific theme. These events would be an opportunity to engage more widely with presentations potentially coming from outside the membership as well as from within. The hope would be that these would stimulate greater collaboration in the future within areas of rural research.

Forum held every two years:

The model as it exists just now seems to work well and again takes on a contemporary theme, which is likely to attract wide interest and justify a larger, central location.

Summary:

This proposed approach is designed to encourage greater engagement with SCRR from members, to provide attractive events, which will justify travel and facilitate greater collaboration among the SCRR membership and beyond.

The Executive Committee are invited to comment on this strategy.