

SCOTTISH CONSORTIUM FOR RURAL RESEARCH

The 117th meeting of the SCRR Executive Committee was held at the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Bush Estate, Penicuik EH26 0QB on Monday 28th October 2013

Present:

Stuart Monro (Scientific Director – in Chair)
Willie Donachie
Nick Fraser
Kathy Velander
Alastair A Macdonald (Secretary/Treasurer)

- 1. Welcome & Apologies**
Apologies were received from Ian Bainbridge, Colin Campbell, Martin Price, and Ruth Wolstenholme
- 2. Minutes of 116th executive meeting**
Accepted as accurate.
- 3. Centres of Excellence and Networks: update on all networks**

The James Hutton Institute

Stuart reported that the James Hutton Institute is keen to do something on 'Data' such as soils data, and the geochemical data generated by the BGS Clyde Basin study. There may have been an emphasis from Colin on 'Data Management' and so this topic will be explored further. There was discussion around issues raised by data management such as copyright, who has access, linking data holders, giving access to students, crowd sourcing, and the increased 'ARCHER' the UK's next-generation national high-performance computing facility, based in Edinburgh. Action SKM

Moredun

Willie reported that like a number of research institutes in Scotland, the Moredun was on a five-year funding cycle and that they had been advised to plan to continue with their program until the end of the five years. There will be a 'mid-term' review during the summer of next year (2014). During discussion it was felt that the referendum in 2014 and election in 2015 were having an impact by removing the threat of more financial cuts during those years.

National Museum of Scotland

Nick drew attention to the Museum's interest in establishing a research facility for users of large, industrial-scale CT scanners in Scotland. There is an interest to learn from other SCRR members who might be interested in supporting the establishment of this facility to look at a range of applications including soil sciences, geosciences and biological sciences. To our knowledge, the only commercial 225 kV tube microfocus X-ray CT

system (μ CT) currently installed in any Scottish academic institution is located at the University of Abertay at Dundee (UoAD). There is already a strong and developed need for μ CT analysis in the Central Belt of Scotland, and this machine has been used by researchers from a variety of Scottish universities, and by National Museums Scotland (NMS) and the Glasgow Hunterian Museum. However, it is often fully occupied by UoA projects, at which time external researchers cannot get access to the equipment. A μ CT system has been built by staff at the University of Edinburgh (UoE), but its continued development slows workflow drastically. In recognition of this research impediment, staff at UoE, NMS and UoAD have formed a collaborative network in which supercomputing, software development, visualisation and 3D printing facilities would be shared (Scottish Tomographic Research Network; STRN), and we are keen to try and broaden the group and develop a strategy for building a centralized CT facility in Scotland.

4 **Events in 2012-2013**

Kathy reported that there is to be a workshop on the 16th December at Dynamic Earth on how to stimulate the growth of nature tourism in Scotland. Arrangements were being made to make it a stimulating interaction of different stakeholder viewpoints. Action KV

Stuart indicated that there is the intention to make the afternoon session something of a public event. Details of the latter are still being worked out. Action SKM

Stuart reported that the recent Forum on Metagenomics had been a success. Willie felt that the numbers that attended (44) made it a good size to give lots of interactions and round-table discussion. It was also an eye-opener for many of the participants in showing what SCRR can be. One participant (from Moredun) is known to have circulated a report to his colleagues on his return to the lab (see attached). Another aspect that was appreciated was the pluses and minuses of the topic were put up for discussion – what can and what cannot be done with the technology. The feedback has been good, and it was financially successful in clearing its costs.

Stuart reported that the Annual lecture is set up for 10 February 2014 and will be given by Dr Alan Bedward. His title is: Running out of land – a new global challenge. The institute of Biology have indicated that they will reduce their financial commitment to the lecture. The costs in the past have been shared equally between the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Institute of Biology and the SCRR. Stuart will explore the basis of the recent increase in the cost of the lecture. Action SKM

Workshops topics for 2014 are still being explored, and suggestions would be welcomed from any of the SCRR members. Stuart suggested that the recent increase in the number of small workshop type of events

has helped bring together more people in SCRR organisations who are at the 'working level'.

With respect to the new structure of the Directors' research lunches Stuart said that he did not think that the cultural change had yet been made with this change in format; the cross-institution research step had yet to be made. Nick suggested that perhaps something like the notion of a Scottish CT scanning facility might form the basis of presentations illustrating a shared interest. Willie suggested that the institutes be specifically asked to present examples of collaborative research work (or potential collaborative work) and have speakers from both (or more) participants. The next opportunity to explore this will be at the Directors' research lunch at Moredun in the Spring time. Action WD

It was also suggested that the Directors should bring someone from their institute with them to assist the spread of knowledge of the work of SCRR and the potential for inter-institute collaboration. Action SKM & AAM

5 **Membership**

SAMS have been signed up as a new member. Stuart used the matrix to offer to SAMS the chance to self-assess where they might fit. The University of Aberdeen has been approached, as have the Universities of Dundee and St Andrews. Glasgow will also be approached shortly.

6 **Finances**

The treasurer reported that the set of Accounts has gone out to Mike Talbot as the first Independent Examiner. Financially the Consortium is in good shape and that is in part due to support from Genomics Forum for the Perth Meeting to cover any shortfall, and similarly for the Metagenomics meeting. Costs have also been kept in check. The aim has been to build a reserve roughly equivalent to the income for one year, and this is being attained.

The Consortium membership fee structure, as explored with SAMS, will be maintained to see how new consortium members react to it. The treasurer indicated that he would be keen, at the next Board meeting, for the Consortium members to be asked to pay the extra £5 or so to bring everyone into line with the new membership fee structure.

7 **Contacts**

Stuart indicated that the Scottish Science Advisory Council had reported: <http://www.scottishscience.org.uk/article/ssac-update-report-2>

The Council is continuing its work on the current scientific evidence around Synthetic Biology, and also continuing to monitor the current debate on Open Access Data and Open Access Publishing associated with publically funded research. The executive, particularly from the viewpoint of the costs involved, discussed the latter topic. Who should pay? Will this lead to research eventually only being done by the rich large institutions? Could there be an opportunity to have a joint workshop with SSAC on this topic? Action SKM

On the topic of the Scottish Referendum, the question was raised whether any institute had made plans, on a business continuity basis, for a referendum 'yes' vote? A number of the questions described in the 'SSAC paper on Science and Engineering in Scotland in the Independence Debate' were raised by the Executive. There are as yet no answers. It is anticipated that these might be contained in the White Paper that is due to be published on 26th November.

SSAC have also agreed to undertake a review of current activities associated with Big Data in Scotland, to be undertaken by Prof Jon Oberlander.

8 Publicity and Communications

The Secretary reported that the SCRR website was being updated where he had the skills to make those changes. Damien continues to do the more complicated updates. The aim continues to be that it should present the information and news relevant to SCRR in as fresh and attractive a way as possible.

The SCRR Newsletter had just been published and delivered. It would be mailed out shortly. Damien's skill in the layout was much appreciated, as was the effort of each contributor from the SCRR membership; they make the Newsletter what it is.

9 Residual matters from the minutes of the 116th meeting.

None.

10 Any other business.

The question of low attendance at recent Directors' meetings was raised and discussed. Willie suggested that it might be useful to have more discussion at these meetings, particularly around potentially contentious issues. The next time that the Directors' meet for lunch will be at the Board meeting at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, Easter Bush on 13 January 2014. Two potential topics for discussion might be 'Open Access' and 'SSAC questions, and the answers in the White Paper'.

11 Date and place of next Executive meeting.

Monday 2 December, at Sniffer, Greenside House, 25 Greenside Place, Edinburgh EH1 3AA.