Upcoming Events

Biochemical Basis of Respiratory Disease
8–10 January 2018, Nottingham, UK

Shaping your career in molecular biosciences: taking a wider view
15 January 2018, London, UK

Industry and Academic Collaboration Award Lecture and networking reception
15 January 2018, London, UK

The Brighton Science Festival, Bright Sparks event
10–11 February 2018, Hove, UK

The motivation to experiment – an art and science exchange, joint with Central Saint Martins
27 February 2018, London, UK

BSGCT Public Engagement Day
15 March 2018, Oxford, UK

The Dynamic Cell III
19–21 March 2018, Manchester, UK

Evolving molecular bioscience education
12–13 April 2018, Chester, UK

New Horizons in ESCRT Biology
17–20 April 2018, London, UK

30th Annual UK RNA Polymerase focused meeting
19–20 April 2018, London, UK

83rd Harden Conference Autophagy - from Molecules to Disease II
3–6 June 2018, Warwick, UK

The Biology and Physics of Bacterial Chromosome Organization 2018
June 2018, Leiden, The Netherlands

Translation UK 2018
5–6 July 2018, Manchester, UK

Small G Proteins in Cellular Signalling and Disease
9–12 July 2018, Cambridge, UK

Meeting Reports

European Drosophila Research Conference 2017

22–25 September 2017, Imperial College London, UK

EDRC 2017 was the largest yet, with 800 delegates from all over the world. The conference opened with four workshops (gut & microbiota, cell competition, immunity and mitochondria), and spectacular opening plenaries. Ruth Lehmann (NYU, USA) presented her lab’s latest work on the diversity of mechanisms through which germ line cells escape somatic differentiation and preserve totipotency and Marc Freeman (Vollum Institute, USA) demonstrated that glial cell function extends far beyond their known role in supporting neuronal homeostasis, to being active participants in neurotransmission.

There were 422 excellent posters. In the student category, Ramya Balaji (Classen lab, Freiburg, Germany) stood out by presenting her work on how the germline influences follicular epithelium cell shape transitions in ovaries. In the postdoc category, John Davis (Tapon lab, Francis Crick Institute, London, UK) won for his poster on mechanical forces in histoblast development.

Fittingly, the sun set on EDRC 2017 with a brilliant plenary on sleep by Amita Sehgal (University of Pennsylvania, USA) who wowed the audience with the delineation of the output circuit that transmits circadian signals from the clock neurons to the fly’s motor centres, as well as the identification of a novel sleep-inducing molecule.

Alex Gould and Nic Tapon
(The Francis Crick Institute)

The 3rd BiKiE symposium

16–17 Sep 2017, UCL Institute of Child Health, London, UK

The 3rd BiKiE symposium aimed to bring together Korean and European scientists working in various fields of Biomedical Sciences, following the recent signing of an International Associate Membership agreement between the Biochemical Society and the Korean Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (KSBMB) to encourage scientific communication and strengthen the global networks between Korea and Europe. Representatives of KSBMB as well as the Korean Academy of Science and Technology (KAST), Korea Institute of Science and Technology (KIST-Europe) and Yonsei University gave short presentations introducing their organisational structures and activities, along with Laura Woodland, Head of Membership Engagement, representing the Biochemical Society.

The scientific sessions represented the diverse areas of active research and recognised the excellent scientific achievements from Korean scientists. The oral presentations, on the themes of proteomics, genomics, molecular structures, biomaterials and cellular functions, along with poster presentations and small group meetings chaired by senior scientists stimulated much interest and provided many opportunities for engagement and networking. Fifty participants, comprised of Korean scientists currently based in Europe (including academics, PhD students and pharma industry employees) and eminent scientists from top Korean research institutes and universities, enjoyed the event organized by BiKiE, the European branch of KSBMB. The event has provided a strong base of collaborative relationships between the two Societies in the run up to the IUBMB Congress to be held in Seoul, Korea in June 2018.

Soo Hyun Kim
(St. George’s, University of London)

For more information:
www.biochemistry.org/Events
Local Ambassador Focus – Alex Conner

Alex Conner is a Senior Lecturer of Medical Sciences at the University of Birmingham. Alex teaches “the easy bits of the medicine course before we need clinicians” and has a research group studying the structure and function of large membrane proteins in health and disease. He is especially interested in human aquaporins and the exploitation of their structure and function for treating brain oedema. Alex increasingly works in science communication facilitating discussions, talking about science to people without a traditional science background and showing off on stage. Alex is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Biology. He is validated by external titles apparently!

What motivated you to become a scientist?
My main motivation to become “a scientist” was that getting a proper job was hard and I wanted people to call me Dr Conner. My motivation now is that I really love working with and teaching exceptional people. Partly so I can ride the coat-tails of scientists much cleverer than I am.

What inspires you about molecular bioscience?
Figuring out how very small changes to individual proteins can not only explain fundamental physiological processes but also provide a platform for future therapies. Our aquaporin research has directly persuaded a neurosurgeon to start a human clinical trial application. That is both unexpected and very cool. I’m also consistently inspired by the realization that the more I combine research with communication, the more involved I get in public engagement and the better I become at research. Being forced to simplify my explanations led to an ABSOLUTE requirement for clarity of thought.

What are you reading at the moment?
The Long War by Stephen Baxter. I am intrigued by the concept that we are a single point of energy in a natural hologram and that multiple universes might exist; this book plays with that a little bit.

What’s on your lab bench or desk right now?
A cup of coffee. A big list of admin tasks I don’t want to do. A free textbook fantastically called ‘The Top 100 drugs’ that isn’t as fun as it sounds and an augmented reality headset so I can try and teach from inside a beating heart.

What's on your lab bench or desk right now?
Normal desk really.

What’s been the greatest challenge in your career so far?
The acceptance that I am not as good at science as I am at explaining science to interested people. This meant dealing with the hurt pride that I am less likely to get the plaudits (and promotions) that come with major research grants and Nature papers. However, a preference for science communication and teaching means I am genuinely looking forward to going to work every day. That makes life a lot of fun.

What is your advice for someone who would like to pursue a career in molecular bioscience?
Definitely, unequivocally and without hesitation, make sure you are choosing the thing that you think is a hobby. If you would do it anyway, the success will follow. Ask yourself which bits of the field of molecular bioscience you are thinking about when you should be doing something else and go out and get experience or a PhD or a Fellowship in exactly that area. For me, this is about how aquaporins move around the astrocytes and why. I also think about explaining this to people who aren’t qualified scientists. So that is what I do.

What do you do in your spare time?
I do public engagement. Stand-up comedy in science (Bright Club), explaining science on stage (Famelab) and facilitating events and training sessions. I also play Xbox with my sons and try and teach my one-year old how to walk. She’s terrible at it. Especially in wellies.

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Ambassadors are a key group of members that help us to raise awareness of the Biochemical Society, promote its activities, recruit new members and act as the Society’s point of contact at their institution. If you would like to get involved as an Ambassador, please contact: membership@biochemistry.org.

European Platelet Summer School: A Biochemical Society Supported Independent Meeting

4–6 September 2017, University of Reading, UK

The European Platelet Summer School meeting attracted over 90 attendees. Delegates were joined by 29 experts from research laboratories across Europe and industrial representatives who support platelet research. The generous support from the Biochemical Society enabled us to invite international research leaders to share their expertise in an ‘Advances in platelet signalling’ session.

One afternoon was devoted to practical workshops aimed at getting delegates comfortable with new and established technologies and techniques that could enhance their research. A highlight of the programme was the discussion sessions which provided opportunities for the delegates and speakers to interact, discuss their work and to get to know one another.

Two new initiatives were introduced into this year’s Summer School programme: the inclusion of a statistics and data analysis talk and associated practical session; and an informal question and answer careers session where three invited speakers shared their experience with the audience on developing a career both within and beyond research.

Overall the meeting was a huge success. The organising committee of 2017 would like to thank the Biochemical Society for their financial support which contributed to the success of this unique independent meeting in the field of platelet research.

Jon Gibbins, Alice Pollitt, Chris Jones, Craig Hughes and Sakthi Vaiyapuri (University of Reading)