Meeting Reports

Young Life Scientists’ Symposium 2017: Frontiers in Musculoskeletal Health, Ageing and Disease

25 November 2017, University of Nottingham, UK

The theme of this year’s symposium focussed on the regulation of musculoskeletal health during ageing and disease, whilst discussing potential nutritional, pharmacological and exercise interventions to delay the onset of age-related and/or disease-related muscle loss.

The day proved to be a great success, with over 70 delegates from over 40 different institutions, including overseas. We had 3 main session themes: Nutrition, Exercise and Metabolic diseases in ageing. Each session was chaired by a keynote speaker and renowned researcher from the field. Our invited keynotes were: Dr Carolyn Greig (University of Birmingham), Prof Philip Atherton (University of Nottingham) and Dr Iskander Idris (University of Nottingham).

Additionally, there were 9 oral communications, a poster session and two workshops aimed at grant writing success and life beyond a PhD. The award for best oral communication went to Sam Scott (Liverpool John Moores University) and best poster communication was won by Hannah Lithgow (Edinburgh Napier University).

Overall, the day was a great success, we received very positive feedback for the high quality of presentations, workshops and the symposium itself.

Colleen Deane (University of Exeter)
Joseph Bass (University of Limerick)
Amelia Pollard and Jessica Cegielski (University of Nottingham)

British Yeast Group 2017 Meeting

11–13 September 2017, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK

British Yeast Group 2017 bore the subtitle of ‘The versatility of yeasts’ which emphasized the increasing diversity in the topics being researched and ensured that young yeast researchers (both PhD and postdoc level) from the UK, Ireland or further afield, could present their recent results either through talks or posters.

The meeting successfully attracted a total of 68 delegates, including 9 keynote talks and 20 talks from the participants. Together with 30 posters and the rapid fire presentations by PhD students in the Carl Singer Foundation Session, intense discussion went on and numerous collaboration projects were established during this event.

The Independent Meeting status of British Yeast Group 2017 made it possible to invite prestigious speakers from the world such as Judith Berman (Israel), Dan Klionsky (USA) and Andrea Camattari (Singapore). It also allowed many early-career scientists (PhD students and post-docs) to obtain bursaries to attend the meeting.

Chieh Hsu (University of Kent)
Local Ambassador – Lindsay McDermott

Dr Lindsay McDermott is a Senior Lecturer in Biochemistry at the University of Bedfordshire where she leads the new BSc (Hons) Biochemistry degree programme and researches the structure and function of zinc α2 glycoprotein (ZAG), a human plasma protein which breaks down fat cells (lipolysis).

What motivated you to become a scientist?

As a teenager my mum and dad gave me a chemistry set for Christmas. I used this to carry out simple experiments that I’m sure would no longer be allowed for health and safety reasons. I enjoyed mixing and making things, using numbers and solving problems. At school maths and chemistry became my favourite subjects. I studied these as Scottish Highers along with English, French and history. I went on to become a chemistry graduate from the University of Glasgow. During my PhD (also in Glasgow) I became involved in the study of molecular bioscience.

What inspires you about molecular bioscience?

I love that knowledge of molecular bioscience and the use of biochemical and molecular biological techniques gives us the opportunity to tackle today’s medical problems by potentially providing a treatment or cure for them. Recently we’ve heard there’s a drug that appears to slow the progression of Huntington’s Disease and another that cures Haemophilia A – amazing!

What are you reading at the moment?

At work I’ve recently read sections of ‘All about Albumin: Biochemistry, Genetics and Medical Applications’ by Theodore Peters in preparation for my undergraduate practical class (see below). At home I’m about to start reading ‘Corkscrew’ by Peter Stafford-Bow; easy, fun reading so I’m told.

What’s on your bench / desk right now?

On my lab bench are two AKTA Start protein purification systems that I’ve used with my second year biochemistry undergraduate students to teach them how to purify and characterize ovalbumin. We’ve got another four systems on order and I’m excited to be able to train my students in the use of this industry standard equipment. This training will hopefully help propel them into employment after graduation. On my desk is a computer, a pile of text books, some multi-coloured sand and a shell from the Isle of Wight, my lunch, some lab books, some research papers and lots of ‘to do’ lists.

What are you doing in your spare time?

Most Saturdays you’ll find me at my local parkrun either running or volunteering. I’m also known to bake cakes with my two wee nieces, occasionally attend a monthly book group, swim outdoors when the water is warm enough, cycle in a range of temperatures and do triathlons when the notion takes me.

What’s the greatest challenge of your career so far?

My biggest and constant challenge is trying to obtain funding for my research on the fat depleting plasma protein ZAG. With the help of my trusted collaborators, lovely hard working PhD student and small income from a biotech company, my efforts to obtain more substantial funding plough on.

What does your job entail?

As a chemistry lecturer I teach biochemistry in the undergraduate programme. I also supervise PhD students and post docs, have some collaborators, lovely hard working PhD student and small income from a biotech company, my efforts to obtain more substantial funding plough on.

What is your advice for someone who would like to pursue a career in molecular bioscience?

If molecular bioscience is something you’re interested in, then now is a really good time to study the subject. The government is investing in STEM subjects and you’ll find lots of courses on offer. With a degree in biochemistry, molecular biology, or a related subject you can forge a career in a number of jobs from lab assistant to professor, science journalist to editor, administrator to CEO. No matter where you end up on your molecular bioscience scientific journey, you can be guaranteed you’ll be doing something that interests you and contributes to society.

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.

Plastid Preview 2017

4–5 September 2017, University of Cambridge, UK

This two-day conference examined all aspects of chloroplast function and evolution. Oral presentations were given by 19 participants, on topics ranging from the use of riboswitches to control gene expression to the origins of the chloroplast in diverse algal groups. All the talks were from research by PhD students and post-docs, mostly presenting ‘hot off the press’ work, which was not yet published. The sessions were expertly chaired by experienced post-doctoral researchers and group leaders. In addition, we had a successful poster session, where students and post-docs were able to present their research in a more informal manner.

The conference was attended by 52 people, who came from across the UK (and one from France). The attendees included two undergraduate project students, 22 PhD students and 14 post docs; twenty of the participants were female. As a result of funding from the Society, no charge was made for the meeting, and we were able to fund all meals and refreshment breaks for all attendees. Plenty of cake was provided to allow for cheerful conversation!

Ellen Nisbet (University of Cambridge)