

Report on the 14th International Limb Development and Regeneration Conference

Edinburgh 23-26th July

Organisers: Megan Davey, Laura Lettice, Malcolm Logan, Neil Vargesson, Wee L Lam (Clinical Workshop), Ruth Newbury-Ecob (Clinical Workshop)

The 'Limb Meeting' is a well-established but small conference which held every two years. As the field is relatively small, the conference is organised by volunteers from the community and is not supported by any official charity or scientific committee. Generally all scientific leads in the field attend this conference and the conference is perceived as one of the most important conferences within the Limb Development field. Recent meetings have been held in Florida (2015), Canada (2012), Japan (2010) and a UK based conference had not been held since 2004.

At this conference, we (the conference organisers) had two main aims 1) to increase the number of participants in the conference and 2) to improve communication between the scientific 'Limb' field and clinicians working with congenital limb differences.

1) Increase participation

We had 108 participants from 57 different organisations based in Canada, France, Germany, Netherlands, Japan, Spain, Switzerland, UK and the USA. Prior to the meeting the conference was advertised on The Node, through Twitter, the SDB at other developmental biology and limb surgery meetings. We lacked participants from China, India, Central and South America, Africa and Australasia, which is not unusual at this conference as there are no research centres with a central focus on limb development in these areas.

To increase participation we tried to make the conference as affordable as possible (see Table at the end for registration costs). To do this we sought charitable support and commercial sponsors to subsidise costs. In addition we used University of Edinburgh conference facilities (the John McIntyre Conference Centre, university accommodation at Pollock Halls and South Hall for the conference dinner) and catering, which as University of Edinburgh employees (MD, LL) we could pay for through internal university transfer and were therefore VAT exempt. We paid the registration fee for invited speakers (which covered accommodation, food and the conference dinner) but we did not pay for travel- this the invited speakers kindly covered themselves, except for Denis Duboule who was supported by EMBO. Students and retirees paid a reduced registration rate (£500) which was subsidised by the higher rate for non-students (£700). We did not make a profit and have returned the very small excess generated to students who travelled to the UK for this meeting.

We also attempted to increase participation- particularly of women, by offering childcare during the conference. This conference is almost always held during the summer holidays of most northern European countries due to this part of the year being free of teaching duties for most participants. This, however, also creates a conflict for attendees with families. Although the offer was initially taken up by five participants, in the end two participants (including one female selected speaker) used this facility. The idea was applauded by the scientific community, however, and we hope that future organisers will continue to offer childcare. The accessibility of the conference venue for participants was also important. The John McIntyre Centre is a modern conference facility with wheelchair access. The conference sessions, poster sessions and lunches were held within The John McIntyre Centre. This was important for one attendee.

In addition to the conference dinner we also organised early morning walking and running groups to encourage networking outside of the conference program and outside of the context of alcohol. These groups were very successful and attended by a variety of students, post-docs, conference organisers and senior scientists.

2) Improve collaboration/communication with clinicians

The Limb Biology field is unusual as it has been a largely 'academic' field, without extensive contact with clinical colleagues, who work with patient with congenital hand differences. We, however, felt there is a great need on both sides to improve communication between the fields- both to improve patient treatment and experience and to inform our continuing science. MD, NV and ML have had extensive contact with clinical collaborators over the past 10-5 years and have built strong a relationship and reputation with members of the British Society for Surgery of the Hand (BSSH) and the international hand/foot surgery community. With the extensive help and organisation from WLL, we were able to successfully invite many of the most prestigious clinicians in the field to give their perspectives on the outstanding problems of congenital hand differences. Our speaker list for the Workshop was really outstanding showing, we think, that this was a valuable and overdue addition to the conference. In addition we were able to offer Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Accreditation, to encourage more junior clinicians to attend. We offered a day rate for the clinical workshop to encourage clinicians to come- especially if the full conference was too long. We integrated scientific and clinical based talks on this day.

Conference Program

Over 2 and a half days, we had two plenary talks (Marian Ros and Denis Duboule) and held 9 sessions, covering Evo Devo, Limb Initiation, Limb Patterning, Morphogenesis of Support Tissues, Limb Regeneration and a full day 'Clinical' Workshop. 67 speakers presented, 24 of which were invited and the remaining were selected from Abstracts. We also had well attended poster sessions. We tried very hard to have an equal gender balance but only 26 speakers were female. We think this reflects not only the number of women in the field but the gender balance of the submitted abstracts. We attempted to represent every lab which submitted an abstracts with a talk and this in the end meant that we had more male speakers than female. This also made for a slightly over-busy program and this was reflected in comments from participants, that they would have liked more networking/conversation time.

Sponsorship

We were supported by the Anne McLaren Foundation, EMBO (travel for Denis Duboule), Society for Developmental Biology (in travel grants to SDB members), BSSH (support for invited speakers to the Clinical Workshop), The Genetics Society and The Company of Biologists. Indigo Scientific and Blackwells Publishing had sponsors stalls and provided financial support. Abcam, Orthofix and GeneTools also provided financial support. Combined with income generated from registration we have made a small profit, which we intend to return as small retrospective travel grants to international students who did not receive any other support. Our final financial reports have not been concluded but we are happy to share these, when they are available. The financial support was particularly important for us to be able to offer student registration at £500- which was less than what we predicted it would cost for a student based on 100 participants.

We are very grateful to our sponsors. We contacted over 25 companies enquiring about sponsorship- but received very little. This was really due to the fairly niche field. All sponsors were mentioned in our program given to participants and on our website. In addition EMBO slides were shown prior to the EMBO sponsored talk.

Conclusion

Generally this was perceived as an excellent meeting, with an extensive scientific program which generated a considerable 'buzz', although perhaps we should have been more selective and had fewer talks, we did managed to break away from the 'usual suspects' and heard from labs and individuals who had not presented before. The overriding success, however, was the Clinical Workshop. We have had excellent feedback from the BSSH, clinicians and the scientific attendees about the excitement this generated. MD and WLL have subsequently given 'scientific' talks at both the BSSH annual meeting

and at The European Symposium of Hand Surgery and Rehabilitation- a sign that the relevance of scientific work is of importance to the Congenital Hand field. We feel we are beginning to realise the potential in the scientist-clinician relationship which has been so beneficial to other fields, although we still have some way to go before we fully understand each other. This was an impressive first step though.

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Title	Description	Price
Full delegate registration	All inclusive	£700
Student registration	Private room with shared bathroom or shared en suite twin room	£500
Full delegate registration (non-resident)	Includes lunches, conference dinner and ceilidh	£500
Student registration (non- resident)	Includes lunches, conference dinner and ceilidh	£375
Clinical day registration package	Includes room and conference dinner on Tuesday night	£275
Clinical day registration	Day rate for attending only on the clinical day (26 th July)	£150