EASTBIO DTP ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM: Making an Impact

University of Aberdeen, Foresterhill

27-28 August 2013

ABSTRACTS

Professor Verity Brown (Psychology and Neuroscience, University of St Andrews)

"Doing research for more than a PhD"

When people ask you what you do, you probably say you are 'doing a PhD' and if they follow it up and say 'how interesting…what in?' and you might reply 'in biology' or perhaps be more specific and tell them 'I am working on the life cycle of the lesser-spotted Underling'. Fortunately, they do not often ask you why someone is paying for you to 'do a PhD' or why the Underling's life-cycle is so important, even though you may have thought about it and concluded that you hope no one asks because how it might be difficult to think of a convincing answer, and then to make it be true.

The benefits of much of the research we do may not be immediately obvious. The reaction to that fact is sometimes to straight up defend it and this is done by invoking the blue sky, hoping also to prime notions of sunshine and warmth. The alternative is to think about your research differently and, at the very beginning of your research, plan to increase the benefit by making it more immediate and more obvious. In this presentation, I will discuss this second approach and various ways to exploit blue-sky research on a rainy day.

Dr Iain Greig (Kosterlitz Centre for Therapeutics, University of Aberdeen)

"Impact: A two-way street and where it can take you"

Following on from licensing an experimental drug for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis, after 7 years of (often very) short-term contracts and periods of part-time or even unpaid work, I wished to apply the hard-learned skills to other drug discovery programmes. In order to facilitate this, we set up the Kosterlitz Centre for Therapeutics

with the stated mission of 'Creating Impact from Innovation', providing the expertise and resources required to take a biomedical discovery through to a commercially- or therapeutically-valuable endpoint. This centre was founded both in response to the need for impact in research programmes, to the increasing amounts of funding available for translational research and to the benefits in having a cohesive entity to showcase our biomedical research to potential donors. Initially, much of the focus on impact related to where the researcher can take their research. However, in allowing researchers to expand the scope of their programmes, as they capitalise on their discoveries, we are now finding that an aspect of equal importance is where this research can take the researcher. Having had a thoroughly unconventional academic career, one in which patents are all-important and papers just a rare curiosity, I have a unique role within the College of Life Sciences and Medicine, facilitating research from others as well as continuing to pursue my own discoveries. This is all based on impact and getting the most out of both biomedical discoveries and biomedical researchers. It has taken me to some wonderful places and is a road I would recommend to anyone.

Dr Jane M. Reid (School of Biological Sciences, University of Aberdeen)

"Translating ecological research into policy"

Research in biological sciences needs to play a key role in informing the evidence-based policy that is required to effectively manage our natural resources. More specifically, we need to understand demography and ecology in order to manage wild populations that are of conservation or economic value. However it can be difficult to undertake the necessary research within the timescales dictated by policy makers, and to balance the often competing demands of academia versus policy impact. I use the application of ecological science to conservation policy for red-billed choughs, a bird of high conservation concern, as a case study to illustrate some challenges and rewards of linking ecological research and policy.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond (Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of Aberdeen)

"Some reflections on the impact of policy on research (and of research on policy!)"

In recent years there has been much debate on the role that policy plays in influencing and impacting on the research agenda. This talk will discuss the context of this debate and offer some comments on the relationship between policy and research.

Dr Jan Barfoot (MRC Centre for Regenerative Medicine, University of Edinburgh)

"360 degrees public engagement: A case study in stem cell research"

Public engagement is a frequently-used term in research environments and often different people mean different things by it. This talk will take a brief look at the history of public engagement with research and the changes that have occurred in the 28 years since the concept was initially proposed by the Royal Society's 'Bodmer' report in 1985. In 2013, there are several acceptable definitions of what public engagement is and a few things that most agree public engagement is not. The MRC Centre for Regenerative Medicine, University of Edinburgh hosts a number of initiatives, all focussed on the public engagement with stem cell research and regenerative medicine. The largest of these is EuroStemCell (www.eurostemcell.org), a European Commission-funded project which provides accessible, accurate and up-to-date information about stem cell research and creates opportunities for connections between researchers and non-specialists. There are also a large number of projects and resources that have been produced by researchers and public engagement practitioners at the Centre for Regenerative Medicine. I'll tell you about some of my favourites and at the same time propose the concept of '360 degree public engagement'.

Dr Hilary Snaith (Edinburgh Infectious Diseases, University of Edinburgh)

"Bringing to life the Ashworth Natural History Collection: Talking about bones and bugs"

The Ashworth Outreach Project is a Public Engagement project for primary school-aged inspired by the Ashworth Natural History Collection, housed in the Ashworth Laboratories at King's Buildings at the University of Edinburgh. The project is being run by *Edinburgh Infectious Diseases*, the network of researchers in Edinburgh with an interest in infectious diseases, and is being funded by the University's Wellcome Trust Institutional Strategic Support Fund.

One of the main aims of the project is to improve access to the Ashworth Natural History Collection. Currently the collection has to remain in the Ashworth museum which greatly limits the number of people who can visit it. We are constructing a 'treasure chest' to safely transport some of the more robust mammalian skeletal samples from the Collection. For the first time we will be able to take selected specimens out of the University and into schools and science festivals, enabling a far greater range of people to interact with the wealth of history, science and ingenuity that the Ashworth Collection represents.

In this presentation I will talk about the genesis of the project and how engagement of the public with the Ashworth Collection serves not only to educate visitors about the collection itself, but also increases the visibility of the University and exposes the public to current research in *Edinburgh Infectious Diseases* that is building on the legacy represented by the collection.