

Education Sub-Group Meeting Minutes

22 February 2010

ESRC Genomics Forum, Edinburgh

Attendance

Present:

Jack Jackson (Chair)
Lorna Sibbett
Marjorie Smith
Sheelagh Frame

Kenneth Boyd (Chair, Gengage Steering Group)
Mary Porteous (Member, Gengage Steering Group)

Peter Finegold (Isinglass Consultancy Ltd) (Speaker)
Jim Stafford (SQA) (Speaker)
Alison Bell (ScotGEN) (Speaker)

Paul Beaumont (SSERC) (Invited Guest)
Kath Crawford (SSERC) (Invited Guest)
Bella Starling (Nowgen) (Invited Guest)

Apologies:

Sharon Macnab
Roseanne Cetnarskyj (ScotGEN) (Invited Guest)

Not in attendance:

Marit Boot

In attendance:

Steve Sturdy (Grant Holder)
Kathryn Hunter (Network Officer)

1. Welcome and introductions

Jack Jackson began the meeting by thanking those who were in attendance for coming and conveying apologies for committee members unable to attend.

JJ also welcomed Steve Sturdy (the Gengage Grant Holder) and Kathryn Hunter (the Gengage Network Officer) to the meeting. SS advised the group that the position of Gengage Network Secretary has been advertised (closing 19 March 2010) and that he hoped to have someone in post by April. In the meantime, Isabel Fletcher is assisting KH with organising meetings and events, and updating the website.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Conference 2009:

A full discussion of this matter was postponed from the previous meeting. MS stated that she thought the 2009 Conference had been well organised and that there was good built-in time for networking and for meeting and talking to other people active in genetics education. She advised the group that participants in her sessions at the 2009 Conference raised some concerns about teaching genetics in schools, primarily that some issues (eg. IVF and cancer) might upset children. SF suggested that organisers of the next conference should engage more with presenters to ensure that the presentations match the abstracts submitted. SF also

suggested that clearer descriptions of the workshops (so that participants know more precisely what will be addressed) would be advantageous. While it is difficult to find a unifying formula for a conference that draws a diverse range of specialisms, SF noted that the conference went well and received good feedback. JJ emphasised the need to continue to facilitate interactivity at the next conference.

Minutes of previous meeting accepted.

3. Gengage Conference 2010

JJ noted that the focus of the 2010 Conference will be on teaching genetics in schools, and opened the meeting for discussion about the format of the conference.

SF thought it should be held somewhere “inspiring”, such as Dynamic Earth or the Glasgow Science Centre. As the conference was held outwith Edinburgh last year, it was agreed to hold the conference in Edinburgh this year sometime in June.

The group discussed various formats for the conference. There was general agreement that both teachers and students should be involved if possible. JJ noted that the presentations at the conference would need to capture the interest of school pupils and, at the same time, provide practical guidance and training for teachers.

SS and MS wondered whether patient groups should be involved. SS suggested looking into having the conference CPD accredited.

Suggestions for speakers and dates for the conference were mooted. KH will enquire about venues and dates, and will circulate further information to the Sub-Group shortly.

4. Dates for future meetings

Next meeting:
Tuesday 7 September 2010.

5. Presentations on opportunities and needs around genetics education in secondary schools

JJ welcomed the speakers and invited guests to the meeting. He stated that the purpose of the second part of the meeting was to bring together people with expertise in genetics education to share information and to facilitate ongoing collaboration.

The first presentation was given by Peter Finegold (Isinglass Consultancy Ltd) on Bringing contemporary genetics into young people’s learning: The Nowgen School Genomics Programme. The aim of the Nowgen School Genomics Programme is to provide teachers with ways to introduce genomics in their teaching, to explore social and ethical issues around genomics and to explore the impact of research outputs and applications of genomics on health decision-making. The Programme provides educational support materials, television programmes and visits to research units for teachers and students.

Although Peter’s work focuses on England, it could be adapted for Scotland.

The second presentation was given by Jim Stafford (SQA) on Proposals for a new curriculum in Higher Biology and Human Biology for Schools and Colleges. He provided handouts for the group and discussed the changes being suggested for biology teaching within the Curriculum for Excellence framework (eg. Genetics and Inheritance). A major concern raised by the new curriculum will be how to up-skill teachers to deliver the new content and new

methods of delivery. JJ noted that these changes would have implications for teachers in the UK.

The third presentation was given by Dr Marjorie Smith (Dollar Academy) on The Let's Talk Teaching Tool – how does it work, what are the opportunities and what are the barriers? MS brought along several of her toolkits on Stem Cells; Biobanking; The liver and Alcohol; and Diet, Diabetes and Obesity to show the group. These toolkits are intended to stimulate discussion around scientific issues and encourage students to engage with science. Again, this raises concerns among teachers about how to deliver the content and about methods of delivering discussion-based teaching.

MS noted that this type of activity needs support and CPD if it is to make a real impact. KC echoed this – teachers need practice and support to teach the new genetics in the classroom. JS noted that a QA mechanism is needed for resources.

Dr. Alison Bell gave the final presentation on an empirical study she conducted into Teaching Genetics in Secondary Schools. She noted that teachers in Scotland are interested in a variety of teaching materials, and that it is crucial that all teachers have access to these materials.

6. Closing

JJ thanked the speakers for their interesting and thought-provoking presentations.

KH will send a follow-up email to all who attended the meeting with links from JS that will provide additional information about the Proposals for a new curriculum in Higher Biology and Human Biology for Schools and Colleges.