Accessible science

Café Scientifique gets royal approval

Game for anything
specialist 3D services for life science

Saving parrot kakapo
dietary supplement to the rescue

Spin-outs
disease detection, diagnostic kits and medical devices
Nexxus Events

**NEXXUS NETWORKING EVENT**
Ernst & Young “Global Biotechnology Report 2007”
13 September 2007, from 5.30 pm at The Corinthian, Glasgow

**NEXXUS BIOSCIENCE CLUB**
Productive Networking (sponsored by BioReliance)
19 September 2007, from 5.30 pm at Glasgow Caledonian University

**HORIZONS IN BIOMEDICINE SERIES**
The Nexxt Big Thing in Stress and Chronic Disease (sponsored by Thomson Scientific)
9 October 2007, from 6 pm at the Western Infirmary Lecture Theatre, Glasgow

**NEXXUS LUNCHTIME SEMINAR**
Logistics of Transportation of Biological Samples
26 October 2007, from 12 pm at SE Glasgow, 50 Waterloo Street

**NEXXUS AWARDS**
Presentation to winners of the Annual Nexxus Life Science Awards and Life-Sci Visions Competition
7 November 2007, from 6 pm at the Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow

**NEXXUS LUNCHTIME SEMINAR**
Life Science Commercialisation
20 November 2007, from 12 pm at SE Glasgow, 50 Waterloo Street

**NEXXUS NETWORKING EVENT**
Speed Networking
6 December 2007, from 5.45 pm at the University of Glasgow

To register online for the above free events, see www.nexxusscotland.com

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**Manager’s message**

WELCOME TO the latest edition of Nexxus News. I trust you had a productive summer? As you’ll have seen from the website the team have been busy preparing the next series of networking events and making sure that company and organisation details are present and up-to-date. As a reminder, if you have yet to register your details or want to update them you can do this direct via the website at www.nexxusscotland.com, just click on the listing button on the left hand side.

I thought I’d take this opportunity to tell you about some of our activities which you may not be so familiar with. Hopefully Nexxus News and our website give you all the information you need on the activities of the companies and researchers in the area but I thought it would be of interest to delve a little deeper into the activities of the Nexxus team. For instance – did you know that we recently exhibited at the Life Sciences 2007 exhibition at the SECC? This event, the first joint meeting of the Biochemical Society, the British Pharmacological Society and The Physiological Society, attracted a worldwide audience enabling us to spread the Nexxus message far and wide and encourage local attendees to get involved in Nexxus and find out more about what we can do for them. This, and Bio in Boston, are just a few examples of the exhibitions we have taken part in this year with The Society for General Microbiology
161st Meeting in Edinburgh (September) and Genesis in London (December) among those we have lined up to make sure the messages from the West of Scotland are reaching audiences far and wide. From the feedback we’ve received, they’re impressed and keen to know more about what the region has to offer.

As well as taking part in exhibitions we act as ambassadors for the community at meetings and in consultations. I advise the Life Sciences Alliance and the Industry groups through our role in the Scottish Bio Regions Group and have been invited by the UK government’s Department of Business Enterprise and Regional Reform to take part in their regional bioscience meeting in order to contribute to the knowledge of the sector across the UK as a whole. We are also asked to talk about the activity of the region to broader audiences. On behalf of Nexxus I have presented at a “Matinée Biotech” in Brittany as a guest of Si Tous les Portes du Monde network and in September will speak to delegates from the Gold Coast of Australia who too are seeking information on the region and the potential it offers for investment and partnerships.

This information sharing role is one that Nexxus sets at the forefront of its service delivery. On a daily basis we respond to queries from the community, answering questions as diverse as mapping the key strengths and capabilities of the region for European investors to where to find information on clinical trials or genetic determination of horse lineage! We answer queries from people looking to find out more about the region but also from those within the region looking for information and connections further afield. It’s this local level of connectivity where our talents can really come into play.

Over the past few months I’ve been out visiting lecturers within the Universities letting them know about the services and support we can offer through PR, press releases, coverage of stories and promotion of their work; I’ve been to companies to tell them of the support we can give for partnerships, PR, networking and information provision; and I regularly meet with our funders from the NHS, local councils and Universities to ensure we make the most of the plethora of information and opportunities that abound within the West of Scotland.

… and after all that, I relax with a cup of coffee and get up to date with the whirlwind of activity that’s been taking place in Nexxus HQ while I’ve been away.

Have a good autumn!

Kate
Nexxus Manager
T: 0141 330 4812
E: k.rowley@nexxusscotland.com
Next generation 3D tools

RIPPED FROM the heart of the games industry, Aarkid is a Glasgow based company set up in 2005 providing a fresh approach to 3D visualisation of complex systems. Specialising in customer (patient) education, they concentrate on creating super-easy interfaces and aim for a ‘zero learning curve’; allowing end users to interact with important information in an intuitive way.

Anatomy models

Creating 3D for the life sciences sector started when they were asked to provide Astra Zeneca with accurate 3D anatomy models. After an extensive search it was realised that the life science sector was massively under-serviced when it came to professional visualisation. Aarkid have stepped in to fill that gap and provide a modern interface between complex technical information and language for the lay-audience. The project was quickly followed with another set of virtual anatomy models, this time created for Ansoft Corporation in a bespoke format to ensure compatibility with their existing software.

There is a public dataset available from The Visible Human Project for 3D anatomy and this provided a basic starting point from which some clever interpretation was required to convert it into a useable 3D model. Several processes were involved, including input from two anatomy artists, and the result was a fully optimised model compatible with the client’s existing processes.

Operating theatres

Far from simply producing 3D content however, Aarkid also provide interactive 3D systems. For example, when challenged by Skytron Surgical (a US hospital equipment manufacturer) to come up with an online operating theatre design tool, Aarkid responded with a fully interactive 3D web application, or 3D Configurator as it is called in the States.

‘Everything down to the branding on the surgical gas outlets needed to be configurable by the end user,’ said Damian Tremlett, Team Director. ‘It was not an easy task to plan and we chased down several options before identifying the best solution.’ The end result was a web application that allows users to design and cost a fully equipped hospital operating theatre. Such was the success of the application that at last count it was being used by more than two hundred staff, each having received no more than half an hours training. ‘This lack of need for formal training is what makes our systems such a great success,’ Damian continued. ‘When using these design tools, clients tend to use the word ‘playing’ rather than ‘working’. In effect, by identifying the underlying simple structures of complex systems, and then using that insight to lead users through simple, easy to understand steps we create highly effective marketing and education tools. By providing massive amounts of information in a simple, intuitive and engaging way, we aim to set a new, higher, standard for patient and consumer education.’

Glasgow Science Centre

For an example a little closer to home, when Glasgow Science Centre needed to market their new facilities on a strictly limited budget, Aarkid were able to produce an interactive 3D high resolution tour of the facilities which could be distributed on USB flash drives. An extra £0.25M of business resulted within a few months and the presentation was nominated for the 2007 Orange Business Awards in the ‘Best Use of New Technology’ category.

Investor funding

Aarkid’s 3D presentations have also proved crucial in helping some of their clients to secure investor funding by making their products more visually accessible and therefore easier to understand. ‘Visualisation is a powerful tool,’ says Damian. ‘Some people can take a concept and immediately visualise the finished item but others just can’t do it. Anything which can aid potential investors’ understanding is a real boon to those seeking funding.’

The team

Between them, the Aarkid team of only 6 core staff have experience spanning computer game programming and design, film and TV production; and marketing. They have a deep understanding of user behaviour and the importance of clear visuals to the end user when addressing new or complex tasks. Despite all of this in-house expertise however, they remain sufficiently down-to-earth to claim that the main contributors to the success they enjoy are simply the application of intelligent enthusiasm and a monstrous pile of common sense – not a bad combination it would seem.

With plans to release a set of generic 3D tools over the next year, Aarkid have recently teamed up with a group of Australian dentists to focus on raising the bar of dental patient education software. With other projects also in development, including an online 3D anatomy tool, they certainly have no trouble in visualising an extremely busy future for themselves.

For further information contact
Damian Tremlett, Team Director
T: 0141 342 4237
E: damian@aarkid.com
W: www.aarkid.com
Expansion of Scottish operations

Capacity doubled

WEST OF SCOTLAND Science Park based Evotec has doubled its capacity for the aseptic (sterile) GMP manufacture of pharmaceuticals to be used in clinical trials.

Evotec’s formulations business is a niche provider of contract pharmaceutical development services for the development of formulations of pharmaceuticals intended for parenteral administration and the manufacture of formulated drugs for use in Phase I and Phase II clinical trials. Its client base comprises pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies around the world and it has particular expertise in the development of lyophilised (freeze-dried) formulations and the subsequent sterile manufacture of those formulated drugs. In addition, it has dedicated facilities to assist in the development of cytotoxic (cytostatic) pharmaceuticals.

The expansion of the facilities is in response to the demand from its clients for clinical supplies of liquid and lyophilised drug product. Evotec has demonstrated its expertise in drug formulation development and sterile manufacturing, offering its clients services of the highest quality and technical standards. These additional facilities will allow Evotec to shorten the lead-time to access its manufacturing capabilities and will save its clients time. This will therefore accelerate the progression of Evotec’s clients’ drugs into the clinical stage of drug development.

Dr Mark Ashton, Executive Vice President Business Development Services at Evotec, commented ‘We are delighted that we have added further sterile manufacturing capacity to our Glasgow facility. We continue to see an upturn in the market for pharmaceutical development and strongly believe that we can significantly help our clients bring new medicines to the marketplace quicker and more efficiently using our newly expanded formulation and chemical development capabilities.’

New jobs created

THE AMERICAN drug development company, PPD (Pharmaceutical Product Development), has announced that it will create 390 new jobs in North Lanarkshire.

This expansion has been supported by a £4.5M Regional Selective Assistance (RSA) grant from the Scottish Executive. This RSA grant follows a previous RSA grant of £3M in 2005, which resulted in 100 new jobs. It is expected that PPD will invest a total of £15M over the next three years as part of the expansion.

The expansion will take place at the PPD facility based at Strathclyde Business Park with the addition of a new 34,000 square foot unit, doubling the company’s floor space. New jobs created will be in various departments, including biostatistics, data management, pharmacovigilance, product development and clinical trial management.

Fred Eshelman, Chief Executive Officer of PPD said ‘With the biopharmaceutical industry increasingly relying on global outsourcing to speed drug development and reduce costs, demand for our services continues to grow. Scotland offers both intellectual and technical resources that make it an important hub for our global clinical research operations’.

Enterprise Minister, Jim Mather said ‘This is a significant and very welcome investment by PPD to expand its operations in Scotland. The economic benefits of 390 jobs and a new facility not only impact on the local community, but also make a very positive step towards increasing sustainable economic growth in Scotland.’

Jack Perry, Chief Executive of Scottish Enterprise said ‘This project represents a highly valuable and very welcome development for the life sciences sector in Scotland. As one of the top three contract research organisations in the world, PPD’s operation is a vital part of the research operations’. The economic benefits of 390 jobs and a new facility not only impact on the local community, but also make a very positive step towards increasing sustainable economic growth in Scotland.

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Partnership agreement

CUMBERNAULD BASED TPS Healthcare Group has entered into a partnership agreement with Soliton IT Limited.

The agreement means that in addition to Soliton IT, TPS will also market and distribute Soliton IT’s Speech Processing systems, including the company’s popular integrated speech recognition, digital dictation and workflow products.

TPS is well known for its eFilm PACS and workflow products across hospitals in the UK, which were originally developed and brought to market by two of the Company Directors. The eFilm products were very successful and ultimately acquired by Merge Technologies Inc. Since then TPS has continued to grow and the company is now a large distributor of Radiology Imaging equipment with a commanding position in the UK marketplace.

Bob Watson, Managing Director of Soliton IT, said ‘When the opportunity arose to partner with TPS, I was delighted. There is a great deal of synergy between the two companies and I am greatly looking forward to working with Catherine McCallum and her team to provide the NHS with robust and reliable speech processing solutions.’

Catherine McCallum, Managing Director of TPS said ‘We are delighted to be chosen by Soliton as their UK distributor as we believe the product represents a new age in speech recognition for the healthcare market.’

nexxusscotland.com
Prostate cancer grant

PROFESSOR HING LEUNG, based at Glasgow University’s Division of Cancer Sciences and Molecular Pathology, and the Beatson Institute for Cancer, has received a research grant of £74,000 from the Prostate Cancer Charity.

In Scotland, prostate cancer is now the most common cancer amongst men and the third most common cancer cause of death for men. In 2004, there were 2,550 new cases, and the incidence of prostate cancer in the country is increasing - 765 men died of prostate cancer in Scotland in 2005.

The grant was given following a national ‘Call for Research Proposals’ for prostate cancer specific applications from all UK research centres. The Prostate Cancer Charity received 49 requests for funding and made awards to seven projects throughout the UK and across the range of research need rather than focus all our concentration in one centre. This is a significant step forward in the Charity’s development and for men in the UK. We intend to invest at least a further £500,000 in new research in March 2008 and will continue this programme annually. As funds grow, we will step up our research investment year on year.’

Professor Leung intends to use state-of-the-art technologies to investigate the newly discovered MEK5/ERK5 signalling pathway as a target for developing a new treatment for prostate cancer.

Both MEK5 and ERK5 are important molecules within normal cells. Work already done by Professor Leung’s research group has revealed that these molecules are key driving forces in the development and progression of prostate cancer. Experiments have shown that their activation can cause the cell to switch on specific activities associated with cancer development.

Professor Leung said ‘This Glasgow research could lead to the development of a new drug to treat men with prostate cancer. Given the novelty of this project and the potential role that these proteins play in other cancer types, it is possible that an effective drug against MEK5 and other related proteins will have added value with other cancers. This could prove to be very significant research.’

Professor Leung serves on the Executive Committee of the nationally funded Prostate Cancer Collaborative (PROMPT), the Scientific Advisory Board of the Orchid Cancer Charity and the MRC Clinical Training Fellowship Panel. He also chairs the newly formed Section of Academic Urology within the British Association of Urological Surgeons.

Prior to joining the University of Glasgow in September 2006, Professor Leung played a key role in establishing translational research in Urology across the UK, as Head of Urological Oncology at Newcastle University.

He said ‘Over time I hope to put Glasgow firmly on the map for Urology, a task which will be aided greatly of course by the area’s already excellent infrastructure for clinical trials and incredibly supportive patients. Links between the University, the Beatson and the NHS here are growing all the time – all in all it’s an exceedingly positive environment to work in.’

Optical brain imaging

GLASGOW CALEDONIAN University has recently allocated funds from the Science Research Infrastructure Fund to acquire a near infrared system for Optical Brain Imaging. This facility will be unique in Scotland and will enhance brain research within the School of Life Sciences and among its collaborators.

Optical Brain Imaging Systems use a technique based on near infrared spectroscopy providing a non-invasive tool for measuring the dynamic changes in oxy- and deoxygenated haemoglobin levels in the human brain during mental activity.

Scientific visions

DON’T FORGET to enter the Nexxus Life-Sci Visions Competition for a chance to win a £100 Amazon gift voucher and to have your image of life science included in a special Nexxus calendar for 2008.

The competition aims to encourage people to think about life science in a new way and celebrate its many shapes and forms in a visual format. Full details regarding eligibility, size/type of entry which is acceptable for the competition and the entry form can be found on the Nexxus website home page. Closing date is 1 October 2007.
Damp doggies dawdle!

IT WASN’T exactly flaming June, when the second annual 5k and 10k Doggie Dawdle on behalf of the campaign to build a new Small Animal Hospital at the University of Glasgow’s Vet School, took place around Garscube’s beautiful grounds. In fact, it was sometimes hard to see the route through the driving rain, pelting down in typical Glasgow fashion. However, around 210 hardy souls donned raincoats, wellies and umbrellas and, walking 103 dogs, showed true spirit despite the weather.

One participant was symbolic of why the walk was taking place. Harvey, a beautiful one-year-old labrador came out for a short walk from the small animal hospital, where he has been an in-patient for four months after being run over by a taxi. He was expert at managing his doggie wheelchair, was full of life and eager to make friends with all the other dogs.

‘He’s been getting physiotherapy and is doing really well,’ said owner Emma Cumming. ‘We are hopeful we’ll be able to get him home for weekends soon, which will be wonderful. However, I was glad to be able to take him out today to say a small ‘thank you’ to the staff at the hospital, who have been absolutely wonderful – they couldn’t have done more.’

Another dog who had a luckier escape, was Georgie from Kelso, who was recently taken into the hospital with breathing difficulties. It transpired he had inhaled a frond of a pinecone which had stuck in his nose. He faced difficult and dangerous surgery through the skull to remove it, but fortunately, staff managed to dislodge it before that became necessary. ‘We just had to come today to show our support,’ said walker, Margot O’Donnell.

Claire Stevenson, Claire Jenkins and Karen Macdonald from specialist life sciences company Biopfa Ltd, which is based at the Wepers Centre at Garscube, also braved the elements. ‘We were keen to take part as we are based on the vet school campus and felt we should contribute,’ they explained. ‘So, accompanied by Benji, Brook and Errain, we had a thoroughly enjoyable day despite the persistent rain. We are looking forward to next year’s event and have our fingers crossed for some sunshine!’

A total of £3,837 towards the £10M new facility was raised by the event, bringing the total raised to date to £7M. Work will start on site at Garscube by the end of the year with the facility offering new services such as a Cancer Centre, to treat the growing number of animals suffering from this terrible disease. There will also be a Pain and Rehabilitation Centre to help animals recover from injury and improve the quality of life of those pets suffering from chronic pain.

To make a donation to the campaign contact Ailsa Macmillan, Development Officer T: 0141 330 2808 E: a.macmillan@admin.gla.ac.uk

Acquisition finalised

AVISTA CAPITAL PARTNERS, a leading private equity firm, has completed its acquisition of BioReliance Corporation, a business unit of Invitrogen Corporation for approximately $210M. BioReliance is a leading contract service organization providing biological safety testing, toxicology, viral manufacturing, and laboratory animal diagnostic services to the pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical industries globally.

Tim Derrington, who served as General Manager of BioReliance under Invitrogen, has been appointed CEO. Charles Harwood has been appointed Executive Chairman of the BioReliance Board of Directors. Mr Harwood was previously President and CEO of Focus Diagnostics, where he worked closely with the Avista Capital Partners team.

Tom Derrington said ‘Avista is the ideal partner to help us enhance our ability to develop and deliver outstanding biologics safety testing and other R&D testing services to our customers. We look forward to benefiting from the Avista team’s extensive experience and understanding of the healthcare industry, and strengthening our company’s leading position in the niche markets in which we operate.’

‘We are eager to partner again with Charles Harwood and look forward to working with Tim Derrington and the entire BioReliance team,’ said David Burgstahler, a partner at Avista Capital Partners. ‘BioReliance has built an impressive record as a premier service provider and is a recognized leader in each of its service areas, and we are very excited about the company’s future growth prospects.’

Dr David Onions, most recently Chief Medical Officer for Invitrogen Corporation, will return to BioReliance as Chief Scientific Officer.
Engaging events

EVENTS WHICH enable higher education institutions to communicate with school pupils are a vitally important aspect in maintaining links with potential future students and engaging young people with scientific disciplines.

At the University Campus, Hamilton (formerly Bell College of Technology*) a range of events designed to meet this need in the sector of biological and chemical sciences take place each year.

A Science Fair involving around 100 S3 pupils is one of the largest events of the year. Consisting of integrated biology and chemistry streams the pupils participate in practical exercises with prizes being awarded to the schools which achieve the best performances. This year the biology sessions involved a simple DNA extraction procedure allowing the pupils to see their own genetic material. Indeed, a commercial kit (available from Freescale semi-conductor plant in East Kilbride and the girls prepared and presented posters on their experiences over the three day course.

A Christmas lecture, funded by the Scottish College's Biotechnology Consortium (SCBC) occurs annually. This lecture has traditionally been offered to senior pupils (S5/S6). Last December 200 pupils attended a presentation on ‘DNA : From Crime Scene to Court’ delivered by Dr Adrian Linacre from the Centre for Forensic Science at Strathclyde University. The emphasis of these lectures is on topical aspects of science and allows connection with those groups of pupils who may soon be entering higher education.

For further details on specific biology or chemistry themed schools events at the University Campus, Hamilton, contact Dr Steven Kelly
T: 01698 283100 ext 8316
E: s.kelly@bell.ac.uk

(* The University of Paisley and Bell College merged on 1 August 2007 to form the biggest modern University in Scotland. Both Institutions have combined their expertise in key areas and brought strength in new areas to the new University.)

New schizophrenia treatment

IN A keynote presentation at Life Sciences 2007 at the SECC in Glasgow in July, Glasgow based life sciences company Scottish Biomedical disclosed for the first time its discovery of potential new treatments for mental diseases such as schizophrenia.

Schizophrenia is a psychiatric diagnosis that describes a mental illness characterized by impairments in the perception or expression of reality, most commonly manifesting as auditory hallucinations, paranoid or bizarre delusions or disorganised speech and thinking in the context of significant social or occupational dysfunction. Diagnosis is based on the patient’s self-reported experiences and observed behaviour.

Scottish Biomedical has applied its acknowledged world-class experience in cellular signalling mechanisms to link the function of the enzyme phosphodiesterase-11 (PDE11) to schizophrenia. PDEs play an essential role in controlling cellular messages and as a result, specific PDE inhibitors have been identified as new therapeutics in areas such as sexual dysfunction (Viagra), pulmonary arterial hypertension, metabolic disorders, dementia, and more recently in some forms of depression.

The team, led by Dr Simon MacKenzie, Head of Laboratories at Scottish Biomedical, found levels of PDE11 in schizophrenic patients to be significantly raised in those regions of the brain linked to the disease. They went on to identify a number of potent inhibitory compounds against PDE11. The leading active compound shows greater selectivity for PDE11 compared to the other PDE families (1-10).

Furthermore, the compound also shows promising effects when tested in an experimental model of schizophrenia. These results have demonstrated, for the first time, a role for PDE11 in this disease and identified candidate compounds for treatment of schizophrenia.

Established in 1994, Scottish Biomedical is a private, pre-clinical drug discovery service organisation located on the West of Scotland Science Park in Glasgow. Scottish Biomedical’s drug discovery business integrates ethical tissue acquisition, molecular biology, protein technology, high-throughput screening, cell biology, medicinal chemistry and pharmacology to identify and validate novel drug targets and discover and optimise lead compounds.
Royal approval for Café Scientifique!

CAFÉ SCIENTIFIQUE is a place where, for the price of a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, anyone can come to explore the latest ideas in science and technology. Meetings take place in cafés, bars, restaurants and even theatres – rather than traditional seats of learning like universities or colleges.

Glasgow’s very own Café Scientifique is run by Professor Mandy MacLean of Glasgow University and the broadcaster, Vanessa Collingridge. Held at The Tron Theatre Bar on the first Monday of every month, it has covered all areas of science from dinosaurs to stem cells, astronauts to birdsong! The invited scientist speaks for only 20 minutes (no powerpoint allowed) followed by lively discussion between the audience and the scientist with the questions flowing even more than the wine!

The first Cafés Scientifiques were held by Duncan Dallas in the UK in Leeds in 1997. From there, they gradually spread throughout the UK and then the world.

Saturday 12th May found the Thackray Medical Museum in Leeds alive with delegates attending the 2nd Café Scientifique Organisers’ Conference. Ninety delegates swelled the meeting rooms which hummed to the sound of enthusiastic chat and ideas about new and exciting ways science can be presented to the public. The Café Scientifique ‘movement’ is a ‘bottoms-up’ initiative and delegates were there solely because of their enthusiasm and commitment. Representatives came from 18 different countries including Japan, Poland, Estonia, USA, UK and most other European countries. The diversity of approaches and styles reflected the cultural differences around the world but all resonated with energy and enthusiasm. Parallel workshops were run to discuss a variety of topics including cultural differences, ‘Junior Café Scientifique’, novel approaches (including art, music, comedy cafes, play and book readings) and, importantly, the future of Café Scientifique. Given the commitment and enthusiasm of the people behind them, it’s hard to think that the future is anything other than extremely bright for the Café Scientifiques of the world!

The Cafés are a good example of ‘public understanding of science’ initiatives, now considered extremely important by most of the major funders of scientific research in the UK including The Royal Society, The Wellcome Trust and the Research Councils.

Lord Martin Rees, President of The Royal Society attended the Café Scientifique organisers’ conference, reflecting Royal Society support for Café Scientifique activities. Lord Rees participated in a lively lunch-time panel discussion on whether ‘the public discussion of science will change science itself’. Also on the panel were Professor Mandy MacLean (Glasgow University) and Dan Glaser (Wellcome Trust), along with the chair, Tom Shakespeare. Lord Rees outlined the activities of The Royal Society in support of science communication. The Royal Society (www.royalsoc.ac.uk) is committed to involving the public in learning about and debating UK science, as well as equipping scientists with the skills and opportunities to communicate their science more widely. Indeed, The Royal Society (through its ‘Science in Society Programme’), Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust have funded a study examining how scientists communicate their science to the public. This was the basis of strategies to encourage scientists and engineers to

(Left to right) Lord Martin Rees (President, Royal Society), Mandy MacLean (Glasgow University), Dan Glaser (Wellcome Trust)
communicate with the public, policy makers and media. Public engagement has also been a priority for The Wellcome Trust and they have substantially increased their funding in this area, making them a leading player in the UK.

The lunch-time panel discussion considered the issue of public engagement in science from several angles. The audience was diverse, including academic researchers, full time science communicators, teachers, non-scientists, representatives from funding bodies and The British Council. The discussion was consequently also varied - academic scientists felt they were ‘judged’ by their peers on research outputs alone and got no ‘credit’ for public engagement – something that proved a major barrier to getting more involved in science communication. These scientists expressed the hope that new grant support earmarked for public outreach, and internal credibility for such activities, would encourage academic scientists to undertake such work.

Another major theme arising from the conference was a lack of training for scientists and science students in how to communicate effectively to the public. Engaging today’s teenagers in discussions with scientists would lead to a better understanding of science in future generations. There would be more confidence in asking questions and hence future generations would be better equipped to challenge misleading media coverage. It was felt that science degrees should involve a component of science communication training.

There is a fine balance to be met with regards to media coverage of science. Inaccurate sensationalism can actually lead to more public mistrust of scientific research whilst accurate and informed reporting can benefit the public’s understanding of science. Many of the reasons for supporting the public discussion of science can be self-serving. These were identified by Duncan Dallas at the first organisers’ conference: politicians see it as a way of identifying public concerns, in order to prevent the government from getting into another situation like BSE or Genetic Engineering; scientists see it as a way of allaying public mistrust and also possibly as a means of encouraging research grants; educators see it as a way to encourage students to become scientists; democrats hope it will make science more democratic and change priorities; policy makers want to persuade the public they have made the right decisions and public bodies can use it to justify their conclusions by seeming to consult the public more and be more democratic.

However, many of these aims actually fly in the face of what Café Scientifique is all about. Café Scientifique does not have a narrow purpose but aims to bring science back into culture, into people’s living rooms. The evenings are spent in a fun yet intelligent examination of science, from which each member of the audience draws his or her own conclusions. As for Glasgow’s Café Scientifique, which is supported by the Scottish Executive, it goes from strength to strength with regular monthly audiences of around 80 and occasionally as many as 150 members of the public sharing a stimulating evening with a world-class scientist. As an example, June’s event was a lively discussion on bird flu with Bill Hanage from Imperial College and involved a toy farm, a fluffy toy and a simulated flu pandemic in which 50% of the audience met their fate! And Café Scientifique don’t shy away from controversial topics – July’s event was on the use of animals in medical research and the discussion was led by Professor Clive Page from Imperial College London, an award winner for his outreach activities in this area. Any controversy was carefully and rationally discussed and even the ‘doubters’ left the evening feeling inspired and thoughtful, and all were allowed to come to their own conclusions.

For further information on Glasgow’s Café Scientifique’s forthcoming events contact Mandy MacLean T: 0141 330 4768 E: M.MacLean@bio.gla.ac.uk W: www.cafescientifique.org.
My job

Cathy Watt, Genetic Counsellor, Ferguson-Smith Centre for Clinical Genetics, Yorkhill Hospitals

Q: What does a Genetic Counsellor actually do?

A: Genetic counselling has various aspects to it including education, research and service development but the focus of the service are the patients who have been referred to discuss their family history of disease.

Counsellors meet with individuals to discuss the likelihood of an inherited predisposition to particular illnesses within a family. We discuss the pattern of inheritance, the impact of the illness, possible screening methods and interventions. We also discuss genetic testing identifying the particular gene fault or chromosomal abnormality. Genetic Counselling aims to empower individuals and their families to choose healthcare decisions which are appropriate for each individual.

Inevitably the initial consultation will have a ripple effect and we can see other family members if they wish. We also provide continuing support for the individual and their family as required.

At present, I am site specific to cancer so meet people concerned about a family history of the disease, providing information on risk, determining whether or not follow-up at a specialist surgical clinic is required and where possible offer mutation analysis. For those at increased risk of cancer it’s important to promote a healthy lifestyle and ensure appropriate extra screening so we work closely with surgical colleagues throughout the region to ensure the correct patients receive the correct screening. Genetic testing also identifies individuals who are not at increased risk of cancer.

Q: Tell us about a typical day

A: Working in the health service means no day is typical - which makes this work so enjoyable and interesting!

Certain days are taken up with clinics and the subsequent work generated by patient consultations. Different people have different concerns so each consultation is different. Outwith clinics a telephone call from a patient may necessitate prompt action, so altering the course of the working day.

A patient may live in the West of Scotland but their relatives may not and if they wish to be referred to their own regional genetics service we can arrange it. This means we can be liaising with colleagues in Scotland, throughout the UK and beyond, to co-ordinate care for a family. Likewise we also work closely with clinical scientists in the laboratories at home and abroad.

Q: So what’s taken up most of your time recently?

A: Earlier this year we set up an undergraduate module on genes and cancer for nurses and allied health professionals with the University of Paisley. The module focuses on the rapidly developing field of cancer genetics in clinical genetics and aims to introduce, or extend, an individual’s knowledge of the hereditary aspect of common cancers such as breast, ovarian and colorectal plus unusual cancer syndromes.

My colleagues and I also organised the UK and Eire Association of Genetic Nurses and Counsellors (AGNC) two day spring conference in Glasgow which was attended by 140 delegates. For the scientific part of the programme we aimed to provide a platform to highlight some of the excellent work done here in Scotland. We focused on two main areas - the genetics of common disorders eg heart disease, asthma and epilepsy and an overview of triplet repeat disorders. The conference also seeks to promote good practice and new developments in the field of genetic counselling.

Q: What’s on the cards for the next few months?

A: In August 2006 the Scottish Executive published ‘Review of Genetics in relation to healthcare in Scotland’ outlining plans for investment in the regional genetic services. Then the Scottish Executive Genetic Services Review Committee was set up, charged with the task to determine how to use this investment to the best advantage for patients and families in Scotland. The committee is looking at different areas including clinical genetics, laboratories, education, research and patient and public involvement. As a member of this committee I find this aspect of my work both interesting and challenging.

The Scottish Genetics Education Network (SCOTGen) was set up to develop e-learning modules for genetics education in Scotland for nurses and allied health professionals. This is a collaborative approach between universities in Scotland and members of the regional clinical genetics services and will be officially launched in Edinburgh in October 2007.

On the clinical front my colleagues and I aim to ensure that appropriate patients are offered the opportunity to participate in research. We are hoping to join the IMPACT study looking at targeted screening for prostate cancer for men in families where there is a known genetic mutation in BRCA 1 and BRCA 2. For this study we’ll work with surgical colleagues in urology and it’s satisfying to develop new links outwith genetics. We aim to start recruitment to IMPACT over the coming months.

Q: What would you do if you weren’t doing this job?

A: I came into genetic counselling through nursing. Prior to that I undertook business and management studies at university but eventually realised this was not for me.

I really enjoy my work so don’t see myself elsewhere. This work has afforded me lots of opportunities including studying for an MSc in Medical Genetics at Glasgow University and now participating in developing genetic services in Scotland. I’m fortunate too in that the counselling aspect of this work is so very rewarding.

For more information contact Cathy
T: 0141 201 0802
E: cathy.watt@yorkhill.scot.nhs.uk
**Saving the kakapo**

One of the strangest and most endangered birds in the world, the kakapo, is being brought back from the brink of extinction with the help of scientists from the University of Glasgow.

The largest of all parrot species, flightless, nocturnal and plant-eating, the kakapo used to be found all over New Zealand. But ecological changes, habitat clearance and the introduction of predatory mammals combined to cause a catastrophic decline in numbers to only 51 in 1995.

Another factor in their near extinction is that kakapo breed infrequently. This is because they rear their young on the fruits of native trees. These trees - pink pine and rimu - only fruit every 2-6 years and kakapo only breed on those occasions. During the lean years in between, the kakapo’s natural diet consists of coarse leaves, grasses and herbs which lack adequate nutrients for the rearing of chicks.

Environmental and Evolutionary Biologists at the University of Glasgow, working with New Zealand’s Department of Conservation, produced a dietary supplement with the aim of boosting egg production of the few remaining kakapo.

University of Glasgow Professor of Zoology David Houston, said: ‘Kakapo had been reluctant to breed, and when we analysed their food we suspected that it was their diet that was to blame. Egg laying is a demanding time for all birds, and they need to have certain essential nutrients in their food if they are to lay good quality eggs. We experimentally fed Kakapo a specially made supplement, with all the nutrients that we thought they were missing from their natural diet, to see if this would improve their breeding. Results showed that female birds that took the specially formulated food pellets laid significantly more eggs than those that did not. In 2002, the first year in which the new diet was trialled, they laid a total of 67 eggs.’

Kakapo are still critically endangered, and because they breed only infrequently their recovery will be slow. But this research is a boost to the ongoing Kakapo Recovery Plan, and brings the saving of the species one stage closer to success.

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**Award for visual stress clinic**

GLASGOW CALEDONIAN University’s Visual Stress Clinic has been honoured with an award for excellence in learning, teaching, development and mentorship at the UK Awards for Allied Health Professionals and Healthcare Scientists. The clinic – the only one of its kind in Scotland – carries out a range of programmes examining the vision of people from across the UK diagnosed with dyslexia and other difficulties with learning. The specialist facility treats problems in both children and adults, using a variety of techniques to improve their reading, writing and spelling ability.

The clinic has touched many lives, but it transformed that of David Johnston, a teenager from Dumbarton.

A third-year at Dumbarton Academy, David was studying hard for his standard grades but needed a larger font size on blue paper and read better with double spacing. Without this, words jumped all over the page, meaning he could not read. He had sore heads, was tired and felt so sick that he did not want to go to school.

Dr Nadia Northway of the clinic diagnosed David with Meares-Irlen Syndrome, dyslexia and dyspraxia. Dr Northway prescribed coloured lenses, which are a specific colour of blue and helped David to train his eyes to focus.

David believes that the Visual Stress Clinic changed his life and that he would not be achieving at school without it. His mother, Alison, said that the clinic has given her son his future back.

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**Honours**

TWO WELL-KNOWN figures from the University of Glasgow featured in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List earlier this year.

Pro-Vice Principal Peter Holmes has been appointed an OBE for services to veterinary medicine and to higher education.

Honorary Clinical Senior Lecturer in the Department of Cardiovascular and Medical Sciences, Dr Graham Beastall, was appointed a CBE for services to medicine.
Spin-out news

Disease detection

THE UNIVERSITY of Strathclyde has secured one of its biggest ever spin-out investment deals, collaborating with Renishaw plc, to form a company that will revolutionise the ability to detect diseases.

FTSE 250 firm Renishaw plc has invested cash and instrumentation, with a combined value of approximately £5M over the next five years, for a 75% stake in D3 Technologies Ltd (D3) to produce DNA-based diagnostic tests that can detect diseases, or the genetic predisposition to diseases, much quicker than current tests.

The new technology allows several disease markers to be detected in a single sample of eg blood, without the need to amplify the DNA present. D3 will also develop products for detection of minute traces of chemicals that can be used in the security and forensic markets.

D3 was formed around a team from Strathclyde’s Chemistry department and involves Professors Ewen Smith and Duncan Graham, and Dr Karen Faulds. The company, which benefited from both a Scottish Enterprise (SE) ‘Proof of Concept Plus’ grant and an SE/Royal Society of Edinburgh Enterprise Fellowship in the period of initial business planning, was supported and mentored by serial life sciences entrepreneur Jim Reid, who is also CEO of successful Aberdeen University spin-out, Haptogen Ltd. Mr Reid is now a Non-Executive Director of D3.

The key to D3’s products will be the innovative combination of Surface Enhanced Raman Spectroscopy (SERS) and DNA chemistry that have been developed and patented by the Strathclyde team.

D3 is also acquiring the analytical business unit (ABU) of Mesophotonics Ltd, a spin-out from the University of Southampton, which develops and manufactures substrates used in SERS giving D3 an unparalleled competitive advantage.

Dr David McBeth, Strathclyde’s Director of Research & Innovation said ‘Investment on this scale gives D3 the platform to develop new generation products that have the potential to revolutionise medical and genetic testing. Molecular diagnostics is a very high growth market so the returns for D3 and its shareholders from success could be large.

‘This deal also illustrates the quality of Strathclyde’s spin-out pipeline and our growing linkages with experienced entrepreneurs. We expect further significant investments in new Strathclyde spin-outs to follow when the Strathclyde Investment Fund, currently being raised by Braveheart Investment Group plc, launches later this year.’

Animal diagnostic testing kits

SPIN-OUT COMPANY ReactivLab is to commercialise the new animal health diagnostic technology developed in the University of Glasgow’s Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. ReactivLab will provide services and kits that can detect sub-clinical symptoms of inflammation, infection and disease in both companion and farm animals. These tests can allow pet owners or farmers to know if their animal is unwell before any visible symptoms appear and allow vets to intervene with treatments before a condition has advanced significantly.

IP Group plc, the intellectual property commercialisation company, has invested £450,000 in ReactivLab Ltd for a 33.2% stake. This will be the third spin-out from their partnership with the University of Glasgow.

ReactivLab’s new diagnostic approach exploits blood proteins known as acute phase proteins (APPs). Acute phase proteins (APP) are a group of blood proteins that change in concentration in animals subjected to challenges such as infection, inflammation, surgical trauma or stress. Quantification of their concentration can provide diagnostic and prognostic information. The university have identified specific APPs (and combinations) that act as biomarkers to detect the presence of disease or poor health before visible symptoms appear.

The University’s Professor David Eckersall, scientific founder of ReactivLab, is a world-leading researcher in the area of acute phase proteins in animals co-ordinating the European Concerted Action Group on Acute Proteins in Animals. Specialising in this field for over 20 years, he has presented his findings at international scientific meetings worldwide. He has been responsible for many of the major advances in monitoring the APP response in domestic animals such as dogs, cats, cattle and pigs. He has also invented novel methods for analysis and discovered new applications for the diagnostic use of APP showing the benefit of measuring the proteins in a variety of conditions including bovine mastitis and pneumonia, feline infectious peritonitis and canine leukaemia.

ReactivLab will exploit this research and provide services in diagnostic testing for acute phase proteins eg dog and cat blood samples can be analysed to assist in the very early diagnosis of diseases such as arthritis, cancer and various infectious diseases. Diagnostic kits are also planned to make the approach available world-wide.
The diagnostic test technology has already received Synergy Fund investment via a £200,000 loan from the Fund to the University for pre-incorporation development. Synergy Fund is a Glasgow/Strathclyde university Fund managed by Scottish Equity Partners (SEP). ReactivLab has also received a Scottish Executive SMART Award.

Healthcare products

GLASGOW BASED Polaroid spinout, Wideblue, has raised £1.25M in venture capital funding and created a new company – PWB Health Limited (PWB) – to develop new healthcare products and take them to market worldwide. The first of these, planned for next year, is an ingenious device which will aid women with their breast self-examination.

This is the first spin-out company from Wideblue which was established in 2001 as a separate business unit within the Polaroid production plant at the Vale of Leven factory in Dumbarton. Wideblue provides an integrated design, development and manufacturing centre of excellence, specialising in helping clients take their technologies to market from an initial concept through development and into initial manufacturing.

‘When we first saw the BreastChecker product we were impressed,’ said Jim Hall, CEO of Wideblue. ‘The inventors, Highland Innovations, came to us looking for help in addressing the optical performance of the product. We saw the potential in the technology and our design team was able to develop the product as a whole, improving the ergonomics and the user interfaces as well as the optics. Now the creation of the new company, PWB, will enable us not only to complete this development but also to take the product to market worldwide.’

He added ‘We are delighted to be launching this new company as it underpins our strategy for Wideblue as being leaders in taking world-class technologies to market.’

The funding has been provided by leading venture capital house Longbow Capital LLP, who invested £750,000 on behalf of its clients and the Scottish Enterprise Co-investment Fund who invested £500,000.

For further information see
W: www.wide-blue.com
W: www.longbow.co.uk
W: www.scottish-enterprise.com/equity

Management changes

THE BOARD of Scottish Health Innovations Limited (SHIL) has announced that Adam Christie is to take over as its Chief Executive Officer and that Richard Nelson has been engaged in a brand new role of Commercial Director.

Described in the media as the ‘NHS Commercial Champion’ SHIL is an independent company tasked to commercialise technological ideas out of NHS Scotland, and is backed by the Scottish Government (Chief Scientist Office in the Health Directorates), Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and Department of Trade and Industry.

Adam Christie replaces the company’s previous CEO, Dr Cameron Macdonald, who after four years has moved on, taking up the position of Managing Director of Controlled Therapeutics (Scotland) Ltd and Vice President of its parent company Cytokine Pharmaceuticals Inc based near Philadelphia.

The new CEO says he intends to build on the good work achieved by Cameron, who leaves the company in a very strong position having made considerable commercial progress in the last few years through the signing of a range of co-development and licence agreements.

Scots born Christie was most recently Chief Business Officer for PowderMed in Oxford, where he was involved in the development of a powerful product portfolio leading to the very successful sale of the company to Pfizer earlier this year.

He graduated with a BSc (Hons) pharmacology/physiology from Southampton University, subsequently gaining an MBA (Distinction) at Warwick University.

Christie’s early career included marketing, business strategy and R&D roles with Schering AG, Abbott Laboratories, Fisons and GlaxoSmithKline plus a short spell as a pharmaceutical equity analyst with ABN Amro Hoare Govett.

He was then involved for two years with Edinburgh’s PPL Therapeutics, where he was responsible for the controlled exit process. He took up his new post on September 10.

SHIL’s new Commercial Director, Richard Nelson, returns to Scotland with his family having worked most recently with Corin Ltd, where he managed the clinical research function for the UK orthopaedic company. Recently he was closely involved in gaining FDA approval for Corin’s sale and use of its hip resurfacing product - a new type of hip replacement - in the United States.

Nelson graduated with a mechanical engineering degree from Glasgow University in 1993, and in 1995 from Strathclyde University with an MSc in bioengineering. He has ten years experience and before Corin fulfilled a global clinical research role with Zimmer, a world leader in orthopaedics.
Concept to compound

TECHNOLOGY TO prevent MRSA infection, an oral vaccine to replace injections and a marigold-based treatment for psoriasis are among some of the groundbreaking discoveries showcased at a recent event at the University of Strathclyde.

Research by scientists at the pioneering Strathclyde Institute of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences was presented at a full day event on 20 June designed to bring together researchers with representatives from companies across the UK. The day included talks from leading scientists and academics, including Dr Magid Abou-Gharbia, Senior Vice President & Department Head, Chemical and Screening Sciences, Wyeth Research. There was also time to view and discuss new technologies emerging from the Institute, and a special session for young researchers to present to the invited audience.

The event followed the announcement that the Strathclyde Institute of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences (SIPBS) have plans for a £35M, state-of-the-art building to be constructed on Cathedral Street in Glasgow city centre.

Further highlights of the technologies available from SIPBS, exhibited at the event, are outlined below:

• Compounds to enhance nitric oxide activity in damaged blood vessels
• Drug-eluting stent for high risk patients
• Novel kinase inhibitors for inflammation and cancer
• ES-62 – a novel anti-inflammatory agent
• Anti-obesity compounds
• Novel compound for the treatment of psoriasis
• Novel sedatives and hypnotics
• Synthetic low-density lipoprotein for serum-free tissue culture

Phages are highly efficient at destroying specific bacterial cells and researchers at Strathclyde have now developed a technique which will support the health-related use of bacteriophage in people, including prevention and treatment of MRSA infection in the clinic. The innovative Strathclyde method allows bacteriophage to be bound to physical materials, such as sutures and other medical devices, while maintaining the power of the bacteriophage to kill dangerous bacterial pathogens and prevent or cure infection.

Dr Rainer Engelhardt, the CEO of GangaGen Life Sciences Inc, said ‘We fully anticipate that the Strathclyde team’s relationship with GangaGen will continue to flourish both within and outside of Scotland.’

Working together to give injections the needle

PharmaLinks, the joint initiative between the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde, has concluded a collaborative research deal with Canada-based emerging vaccine company Variation Biotechnologies Inc to test Strathclyde’s groundbreaking technology for administering vaccines orally.

Bilosomes are specialised delivery vesicles that protect vaccines from being broken down in the stomach and enhance their effect upon the immune system. A wide variety of vaccine components can be used with them and they do not require the use of live pathogens, making them a safe and effective alternative to traditional vaccines. The Bilosomes project potentially represents a major step forward in vaccine technology by avoiding the problems associated with injections and increasing the efficacy of vaccines.

Variation Biotechnologies Inc is a privately held biopharmaceutical company focused on the development of vaccines for infectious diseases. They will be working in partnership with the University of Strathclyde to test the Bilosome system as a way of providing a new oral flu vaccine with their proprietary technology.

Adam Buckley, Director of Corporate Development for Variation said ‘We are very excited to be working with the Strathclyde team on this project – the influenza market alone provides a significant opportunity that could be capitalised on by the complementary expertise of our teams.’

For further information, contact Catherine Breslin, Business Development Manager, Research & Innovation, University of Strathclyde T: 0141 548 3904 E: catherine.breslin@strath.ac.uk
New network to tackle HAIs

HEALTHCARE ASSOCIATED Infections (HAI) and Infectious Diseases generally are increasingly seen as priority areas for research by Government. There is now a higher political profile for these infections, and a greater expectation from the public regarding HAIs and the attendant risks of nosocomial infections.

The costs of HAIs in Scotland are substantial and have been estimated at being £183M per year, with approximately 1 in 10 patients contracting an HAI during a hospital stay. Although common and expensive, there are fundamental gaps in our knowledge of HAIs and the specific organisms responsible for infections within hospitals. Historically, this has been an area that has been difficult to get funded and which many clinicians and scientists avoided.

As part of the Scottish Executive’s commitment to reduce HAIs, a group was tasked with exploring how HAI research could be developed and taken forward. One of the outcomes from this work was the establishment of the Scottish Infection Research Network (SIRN) funded by the Scottish Executive Health Department and hosted by Glasgow University. A 15 person steering group, made up of representative members from academic researchers, clinicians, nurses, behavioural scientists, statisticians and educationalists, co-ordinates the functions of the Network. Dr Alistair Leanord, Consultant Medical Microbiologist, based in Lanarkshire is the Director, and Lesley Frew is the Network Manager. The Network plans to operate using the expertise from within Scotland, although links with UK and European bodies are being made.

The network’s prime goal will be to facilitate, promote and deliver research that will significantly contribute to the prevention and control of HAIs. Other clear objectives of SIRN are to build a sustainable, high quality research infrastructure that will support effective collaborative relationships among the HAI research and academic communities. The network also hopes to build capacity and the capability of the HAI research community, develop and shape high quality research bids within themed programmes against any agreed criteria and attract and support research proposals that meet the CSO and other funding criteria. SIRN will also develop the major HAI research priorities for future needs, although in some cases these have been partly identified.

The ultimate goal of course will be to generate, apply and disseminate HAI knowledge that enhances the delivery and quality of patient care.

Dr Alistair Leanord, SIRN Director, said ‘Tackling healthcare-associated infections is critical to the well-being of the nation. The prevalence of infections like MRSA and C Difficile means the work we are doing is more important that ever. SIRN is a bold new weapon in the fight against illness and we are committed to high quality research into improving healthcare in Scotland. ‘Put simply, SIRN will reduce the risk of hospital acquired infection for future generations.’

For more information see www.gla.ac.uk/sirn or if you would like to be part of this effort, contact sim@bio.gla.ac.uk.

Scotland Against Cancer Conference 2007

ORGANISED BY Cancer Research UK and supported by the Cross Party Group on Cancer in the Scottish Parliament, Scotland Against Cancer is a unique event in the Scottish cancer conference calendar. This year’s event will take place on Monday 29 October 2007 in the Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh.

Now in its sixth year, Scotland Against Cancer attracts high-level political support and involvement by stakeholders across the cancer community, including politicians from all parties, policy makers, clinicians, charities, patients and researchers. Ministers for Health regularly address the conference, which has grown to become an important forum for politicians and other stakeholders to discuss cancer policy and services and to make recommendations for future action.

Recommendations from Scotland Against Cancer delegates play an important part in influencing discussion on cancer policy in Scotland. So this year the conference focuses on setting the agenda for the update of the Cancer in Scotland Strategy, and identifying how to meet the new challenges in cancer prevention, care and research. It also sees the return of the popular discussion forum, providing an opportunity for delegates from across the cancer community to share ideas, best practice, experience and expertise.

To register online or for further conference information
W: www.scotlandagainstcancer.org.uk
E: scotlandagainstcancer@biomedex.co.uk
PROFESSOR JOHN LOCKHART, Co-head of the Neurovascular Inflammation Group (NIG) received the prestigious award of ‘Significant Contribution to Research’ at the University of Paisley’s 3rd Annual Research Conference. NIG is a collaborative venture between the School of Engineering & Science (University of Paisley) and the Centre for Rheumatic Diseases (University of Glasgow) with a primary focus on neurovascular regulatory mechanisms, and their disturbance during disease processes such as rheumatoid arthritis.

The work of the group encompasses fundamental molecular biology and cell studies, studies on animal models, clinical research and medicinal chemistry in the development and screening of novel compounds. NIG continue to make ground-breaking advances in this area.

A paper entitled ‘Proteinase-activated receptor-2 (PAR2) mediates the pro-inflammatory effects of synovial mast cells’, based on the doctoral studies of Helen Palmer, has recently been published in ‘Arthritis & Rheumatism’ (2007) in the Journal for Rheumatology Research. This paper builds on the ground-breaking findings of the group previously published in other premier journals including The Journal of Clinical Investigation and Annals of Rheumatoid Diseases.

The group led by both Professor Lockhart and Professor Ferrell (Glasgow) has a high international standing in both the academic and pharmaceutical world and has recently identified and validated two new clinical targets for arthritic diseases. These targets are key to understanding and ultimately controlling the disorders. Dr Henry Keogh, Business Advisor for Scottish Enterprise’s Life Science Business Advisory Service recently visited the University’s research facilities in Paisley and described the group’s work as ‘world class research in identifying, characterising and validating two new receptors with commercial potential’.

The NIG group emphasised their commitment to knowledge transfer in this area at the Life Sciences 2007 meeting held in Glasgow in July. Professor Lockhart, together with Professor Ferrell, Professor Plevin, and Dr Bushell, co-organised a PAR-focused symposium at the meeting, and co-hosted the reception meal at Glengoyne Distilleries.

Professor Hassan Hassan, Vice Principal of Research and Commercialisation at the University said ‘The NIG group are conducting world class excellent research in rheumatic diseases that has already attracted prestigious external research funding including from the Wellcome Trust, Arthritis Research Campaign (ARC) and Carnegie’.

For further information on the group or to explore collaboration opportunities contact Julie Thomson, Knowledge Transfer Officer.

T: 0141 848 3929
E: Julie.Thomson@Paisley.ac.uk
W: www-biol.paisley.ac.uk/neuro/

(*The University of Paisley and the Centre for Rheumatic Diseases (University of Glasgow) merged on 1 August 2007 to form the biggest modern University in Scotland. Both Institutions have combined their expertise in key areas and brought strength in new areas to the new University.)