

ECSITE-UK COMMITTEE MEETING
22 June 2001 – The Wellcome Trust

Present: Colin Johnson (CJ), Gillian Pearson (GP), Tristram Besterman (TB), Alistair Flett (AF), Gail Bromley (GB), Ian Simmons (IS)

In attendance: Gillian Thomas (GT), Melanie Quin (MQ), Nick Dixon (ND), Peter Briggs (PB)

1. Minutes of meeting held 30 April 01

Minutes were approved without correction.

2. Matters arising, not covered by Agenda

Actions have been taken according to Minutes (1), (2), (4). Accountability/legal responsibility (3) to be discussed at Agenda point 9.

GP attended the COPUS meeting on behalf of ECSITE-UK (10 May). Important points are that the Network was at the table, and science centres are being recognised as key deliverers of science communication programmes.

GT has made a series of project-funding proposals to DCMS at Moira Goatley's invitation: Regional training hubs, Top-up science. Also a series of proposals to the Research Councils, with the encouragement of Barbara Knowles (DTI): Training and exhibitions, Enhancing on-line contact between research centres and science clubs/schools, Top-up science and taster sessions for students. These costed proposals are being submitted, to be followed up by the Executive Director.

Action Exec. Director

The DfES has announced funding through the universities for "widening participation" to raise student recruitment from deprived areas, identified by postcode. As soon as appointed, the Exec Director to alert ECSITE-UK members to the opportunity this represents.

Action: CJ/ExecDir

3. Update: revenue funding

Wellcome Trust funding of £70k now confirmed in writing. OST funding of £150k also confirmed in writing. GT confirmed during the course of the meeting that the WT money will be paid in one initial instalment, thus overcoming cash flow concerns expressed by PB.

There is also the need to generate revenue funding from projects, and to build ECSITE-UK's profile within the Wellcome Trust in the post-Laurence Smaje era.

Action:

CJ/All/ExecDir

4. Update: capital refurbishment fund

Memo from GT was tabled. Agreed that CJ and John Durant should meet Clare Matterson (LSmaje's successor, previous head of Policy Unit and author of corporate plan) and take on the lobbying no longer possible through Laurence Smaje.

Action: CJ/John Durant

Agreed also the need to build partnership with government. GT to write to Tessa Jowell to introduce ECSITE-UK, and mention Capital Fund in passing.

Action: GT

Capital Fund's co-ordinating committee to involve the funding bodies other than MC and WT, and to discuss strategic development of science centres with respect to fund allocation.

Action: CJ/PB/ExecDir

Strategic plan of the WT, 2000-2005 tabled.

5. Current Initiatives

BIG Event – Planning for this is under way. There is an ECSITE-UK session on the afternoon of Thursday 19 July and sessions on Travelling Exhibitions and Training on the morning of Saturday 21 July. For the Thursday session CJ will do the introduction, GP and AF will liaise to prepare the remainder.

Action CJ, GP, AF

Science Year – A funding proposal has been submitted for the Science Year on Tour travelling exhibition in collaboration with the Campaign for Promoting Engineering (CPE). MQ and CPE's Graham Nichols are meeting with the Science Year team on 5 July to discuss this, but a decision has been deferred until the next funding round in the first week of September.

Action MQ

A second Science Year funding proposal for Science Clubs has been submitted and received with a warm welcome. This is for £100,000, which, with an in-kind contribution to the value of £160,000 already allocated by Oracle, will cover the costs of the pilot phase. This includes funding for a co-ordinator, initially for six months, hopefully becoming longer term as the project gains momentum. An appointment to this role needs to be made very soon.

Action MQ/CJ

This is ECSITE-UK's first major success and formal thanks to Melanie Quin and Roland Jackson are minuted for their efforts in securing this.

ECSITE Conference 2001 – Lulea – It is intended that ECSITE-UK host a lunch at this conference. No arrangements have yet been made for this, but given the time until the event (November) it is not seen as being a problem.

Action MQ

ECSITE Conference 2002 – South Kensington – ECSITE-UK should have a presence at the conference, maintaining visibility and having an influence on the programming. We will do everything necessary to help make it a success, other than fundraising. The responsibility for fundraising lies with ECSITE and the host museum, and is being undertaken under their direction by Judy Niner Associates. CJ has written to John Durant and Judy Niner outlining this position so that they are clear of the demarcation between ECSITE and ECSITE-UK on this issue.

Each Museum (Science and Natural History) is contributing £25,000 to the conference costs, and a further £125,000 needs to be raised elsewhere. Judy Niner has offered to fundraise for the conference pro bono and is responsible to Audrey O'Connell at the Natural History Museum, who is the UK representative on the programme committee.

ECSITE-UK will assist fundraising in the following ways:

- suggesting possible funding sources
- pointing out benefits to potential sponsors
- providing storylines to various sponsors.

Committee members are asked to communicate their ideas directly to Judy Niner on judy@niner.co.uk within 10 days of receipt of these minutes.

Action All

It was noted that potential funders should be kept clear on the difference between ECSITE, who are seeking funding for this conference, and ECSITE-UK, which may be speaking to the same funders on other matters.

CJ agreed to emphasise this in a letter to John Durant.

Action CJ

ECSITE-UK AGM, Glasgow, 4 September – Glasgow Science Centre has given provisional agreement to host this event during the BA meeting in Glasgow, following discussions between PS and CJ. A confirmatory response is awaited from Rebecca Crawford. The event is to include the AGM itself, a session on the training scheme and a visit to the centre. An additional session on regional issues was proposed and rejected on the grounds of insufficient time being available. Training took priority as the Scottish Science Trust has been allocated money for training by the Executive, so this was an issue of particular relevance to the host country. Apparently the Executive also offered, then withdrew, money to the Trust to fund their involvement in ECSITE-UK. CJ agreed to look into this with Chris Brittan, the Trust's Director.

Action

CJ

ND was asked to come up with a proposal on the AGM arrangements, including an outline timetable, to be mailed to CJ on the first day back after his forthcoming holiday, copied to PB for BA approval. A slot for a Committee meeting needs to be included in this programme.

Action ND

ND was also asked to discuss with AF the Scottish training funding and its relation to ECSITE-UK's initiative.

Action ND, AF

6. Long-term Initiatives

Voucher Scheme – This now has a working title of the Science Discovery Passport. Discussion of this was deferred to a meeting of marketing staff from science centres at which the scheme broadened into a plan to build a community of science centre supporters, which could take on a variety of forms. Discount admissions are now seen as one benefit of the scheme, rather than the driving force behind it. The group is meeting again in Birmingham in July to refine the idea. As a short-term measure a bid for a first phase of this scheme has been put in to Science Year to meet the 17 June deadline for the latest funding round. This will cover a discount admissions scheme which will act as a marketing exercise leading to phase II. In this, phase II was portrayed as a legacy of Science Year. This bid has asked for funding for everything except for the actual publication in a newspaper, that will come as in kind partnership funding when a link is made with a paper. The total amount put in for this is £25,000.

Training Scheme – A contractor, Rebecca Gratton is in place for this. A proposal has been put together for consultation with the personnel managers of the Wellcome Centres. Training will also be the subject of a session at the BIG Event on 21 July and there will be another session at the ECSITE-UK AGM in Glasgow in September. Between these two a questionnaire will be sent round to centres to gather further information.

Action ND

Science Worlds – CJ and ND will be meeting with Gareth Binns of NESTA to discuss this and other issues of mutual ECSITE-UK/NESTA interest. A meeting planned for 4 July was cancelled due to the threat of a rail strike on that day and needs to be rearranged

Action CJ, ND

Communications Strategy – The Sharing Skills Museum Award office has sent ECSITE-UK a letter for circulation to members, but as yet there is no mechanism through which to do this. One needs to be developed urgently. As an interim measure it was decided to obtain the letter in electronic form and

circulate it as email via BIG-chat and PSCI-Com.

Action ND/ExecDir

7. Operating Strategy

Funding

Funding letters from the OST and Wellcome Trust were circulated for information. On the basis of the funding offered in these it was clear that there was not enough money available to operate as originally intended with an office and two full-time staff. This gave ECSITE-UK two possible strategies it can pursue.

- Risk Free – basing the calculations on finances we know we have
- Higher Risk – Assume the executive will be able to raise some money as it operates.

PB expressed concern as to who exactly was taking the risk, given that the BA were administering the money.

It was decided that there should be plans A and B developed looking at the best and worst case for future funding and that the recently allocated Discovery Club money needed to be taken into account in these plans.

Action CJ, AF

For practical operational purposes it was decided that we must assume that no extra money would be available in the first 12 months of operation, even if it could be considered for years 2 and 3.

It was also noted that, the way ECSITE-UK is currently constituted means that under UK law members of the committee are personally responsible for the organisation's debts, should any accumulate. This is assumed to be an unsatisfactory state of affairs which needs to be dealt with. CJ and PB will meet with the BA solicitor to overcome this issue. **Action CJ/PB**

Staffing

To cope with the funding not being sufficient to cover two full-time posts it was suggested that both the Executive Director and the Administrator should be part time. There was a fear that if there was only a Director, they would spend too long doing clerical work, which would not be best use of our funds. On the other hand, fears were also expressed that if the Executive Director were only part-time the post would not attract a candidate of sufficient calibre to fulfil the requirements of the role.

It was decided that the Executive Director post should be full time, initially without an administrator and that they would need to develop efficient working methods to enable them to operate in this way.

The job description for the post was circulated and revisions suggested to make it more concise. It was noted that one of the goals of the post should be to make ECSITE-UK indispensable, or there is a risk that after the initial 3 years covered by the current funding the post could just cease. The job description is to be revised by CJ with a view to posting it publicly on BIG-Chat and other mailing lists by 2 July. Application will be by letter and CV and an application form requiring 2 references.

Action CJ

Accommodation

Wellcome and the BA are currently unable to offer office space. The Queen's Gate Building will not be ready, and the funding is not sufficient to rent central London office space. This is an unresolved problem.

It was felt unwise to locate outside London due to the need to be close to the levers of power, so various alternatives were proposed. Of these the most likely possibility is space in the new Museums Association offices, as TB is aware that they are imminently moving but will not be occupying the entire space initially. He will look into the feasibility of this. Other possible options include the Foundation for Science and Technology, who may have office space and also publish a newsletter which is sent round the various learned societies and in which we could advertise for space. There is also a possibility that the Society for

Chemical Industry might have space, but the drawback is that they are not directly linked to our sort of activities.

Action TB

8. AOB

World of Glass – During his tenure as co-ordinator of the Wellcome centres ND was contacted for advice on the World of Glass by North West Museums Service who run this attraction which is currently suffering poor visitor numbers. Having visited, he has written an appraisal and asked if it would be possible for ECSITE-UK to offer them consultancy on the basis of this. It was decided that it would be inappropriate for ECSITE-UK to get involved on this basis, and that the most we could do in cases such as this was to direct people in this situation to the ECSITE directory of experts on its website.

Action ND

ECSITE-UK as a European organisation – It was suggested that a case could be made to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that ECSITE-UK is an excellent example of a UK organisation taking a leading role in organisations in Europe which might bear useful fruit. It was decided to bear this in mind for the future at some point, but not make it a priority now

Action Exec. Director

Re:Source Learning and Access Standards – TB explained that he has been invited at very short notice to attend a working weekend relating to these, but cannot go. No one else on the committee proved available at the notice given either. It was decided that TB should write to Re:Source and explain that while no one was available to attend this weekend, the process was very important to us and that we would like to be involved as fully as possible in any other stages of their consultation procedure (there are 19 of these).

Action TB

ECSITE-UK/BIG – It was suggested that there might be some areas where BIG could be of assistance to the Executive Director in helping make things run smoothly and that the person appointed might like to bear this in mind.

Action Exec. Director

BBC/Granada On-Line – It was noted that this combination had been selected by the DfEE to deliver National Curriculum on line, and links with them could be advantageous to centres. GB agreed to look into this and mail other committee members.

Action GB

9. Date and place of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will be held in conjunction with the AGM on 4 September 2001, at the Glasgow Science Centre.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 4.10.