

ECSITE-UK COMMITTEE MEETING

26 March 2007, Centre for Life, Newcastle

MINUTES

Present: Linda Conlon (Chair), Goéry Delacôte, Judith Harvey, Heather Mayfield, Rosalind Mist, Stuart Monro, Peter Trevitt, Louise Webb and Nick Winterbotham.

1 Apologies

Apologies received from Kelvin Boot, Simon Chambers, Roland Jackson, Gillian Pearson and Leigh-Anne Stradeski.

2 Minutes of meeting held on 4 December 2006

The Minutes were approved.

3 Treasurer's report

Currently there is a cushion for core costs (KB) for approximately a two year period. It was also noted that many of the projects are coming to their end and few new applications are 'in the pipeline'.

The Committee congratulated the team on this excellent state of financial affairs.

4 Projects progress reports

Brief project reports, the webmaster's report and the admin manager's update had been pre-circulated.

The following reports were circulated to the committee prior to the meeting: project overview, SCEAG project progress report and IDNA overview.

Rosalind highlighted:

- the EPSRC Soundscape project commences in April 07
- Ecsite-uk has contracted Katy Armstrong to write the KS3 Science and Engineering Clubs Handbook
- five grants have been awarded through the SCEAG scheme, and Ecsite-uk will be seeking opportunities from OSI and DfES to visit each of these projects.
- 33% benchmarking surveys have currently been returned by Ecsite-uk members.

Louise provided an update on the progress of Inside DNA: a Genomic Revolution. This included an overview of the exhibition content (document circulated prior to the meeting) and programming. Tour bookings have also opened: the Centre for Life will be the second host venue (after At-Bristol). Other comments included the need to investigate further funding for a launch event and CPD/training needs for teachers and science centre staff.

The committee discussed the research and benchmarking project. Stuart Monro suggested that the forthcoming HMIe report on the Scottish Science Centres could contribute to this work. He also highlighted a current research project with Eco-tourism

students from Napier University, that could also inform the research being undertaken.

The committee discussed working with Ben Gammon and the Wellcome Trust (following their recent report) to provide Ecsite-uk with a clear overall picture of the sector and to identify areas that require further development/support.

Actions:

- **RM** to contact Isobel Bruce regarding the HMIe report.
- **PT** to explore with **RM** and Ben Gammon an impact research specialist seminar.
- **RM** to collate evidence for the impact of the SCEAG scheme on development of lasting relationship between science centres.
- **RM** to circulate school and/or SETPOINT contacts from the KS3 science and engineering scheme to appropriate members.

5 Advocacy

Kelvin Boot has recently circulated an enquiry to CEOs concerning VAT zero ratings (suggested changes to VAT to bring science centres in line with museums and galleries).

Following extensive discussions about advocacy the committee have proposed a three strand approach:

- 1 **National high profile event** – goal is to have an exhibition in the Houses of Parliament or Portcullis House (exhibition + associated launch).
- 2 **Regional funding** – whilst the committee acknowledge that science centres are best placed to seek out regional funding/support, it was noted that Ecsite-uk should continue to maintain and strengthen its relationships with national networks and organisations eg Science Learning Centres (SLCs) and SETNET.
- 3 **Corporate funding** – the committee discussed establishing an endowment fund. The immediate goal is to identify one large corporate backer for the network.

Actions:

- **HM** and **LC** to investigate a national event in the Houses of Parliament in the autumn. The event at the House of Commons is intended to be a cross party one i.e. MPs from all parties. The aim is to generate debate and support for science centres - might possibly be an interactive element to demonstrate what we do best; possibility of linking with National Science Week although something earlier would of course be preferable.
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- **HM** to facilitate a meeting between **LC** and Martin Earwicker (Science Museum).
- **RM** and **LW** to continue a regular meeting schedule.
- **NW** to investigate lobbying companies who might be recruited to further the corporate funding approach.

6 Ecsite-uk update

The webmaster's report and admin manager's report had been circulated prior to the committee meeting.

Heather Mayfield commented that the increase in website use was lower than might be expected and offered to share the outcomes of a current Science Museum review of cultural websites with Ecsite-uk.

The Cultural Olympiad was discussed and it was agreed that the Ecsite-uk team would keep a watching brief. It was noted that there is unlikely to be significant funding.

There is a shortlist of 10 for the regional Beacons for Public Engagement. Five of these will then be selected. The shortlist includes: Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle and Cardiff. Once the national beacon has been awarded, Ecsite-uk will establish a relationship with the beacon.

Actions:

- **HM** to circulate the Science Museum report to the committee members.
- **LW** to speak to admin manager, Webmaster and Ecsite-uk members to gain feedback about possible changes to the website.
- **LW** to contact Heather to discuss new website development ideas.

7 Dates and locations of forthcoming meetings

- *13 June, London*
- *13 September, York (in the afternoon, following the AGM, and preceding the BA Science Festival dinner)*
- *December, Edinburgh*

8 Ecsite-uk – director recruitment

16 applications were received for the Ecsite-uk Director vacancy, and the sub committee charged to progress the recruitment and appointment process have identified 7 candidates for interview. This was discussed by the wider committee and endorsed by them. It was agreed that someone with a lobbying background and proven expertise was desirable - Interviews will take place on 27 April in London.

9 AOB

Ecsite-uk networking event (Ecsite Annual Conference in Lisbon)

The committee agreed to have an Ecsite-uk event at the Ecsite Annual Conference in Lisbon to network and invite some of our European and American colleagues to see what each is up to. It was suggested that RM and LW investigate availability of a 5-7pm slot on 31st May and make suitable arrangements for this event.

Sector funding issues

The difficulty of trying to secure money for such a large and varied membership was also raised at the meeting. It was recognised that this is a complex area, and at some stage it discussions should be opened up to the membership.

The committee agreed to continue to investigate ways that would clearly demonstrate Ecsite-uk's national reach. The diversity and size of membership was recognised, and the merits of establishing a number of lead institutions, which might be able to deliver projects on behalf of the sector eg Inside DNA, was discussed. It was proposed that different science centres/museums take a lead on new national projects in partnership with other science centres/museums and Ecsite-uk. It was agreed that committee members would come back to the next committee with a list of organisations and potential projects/areas of expertise.

Actions:

- **RM** to contact Alike regarding arrangements for Ecsite-uk event/reception.
- The committee to circulate to **RM** a suggested guest list.
- **All** to identify and produce a short briefing paper on a project that their centre would like to take the lead on relating to their expertise in this area, and suggested partner organisations.